

BAP  
0974v

210

*Library of the Theological Seminary,*  
PRINCETON, N. J.

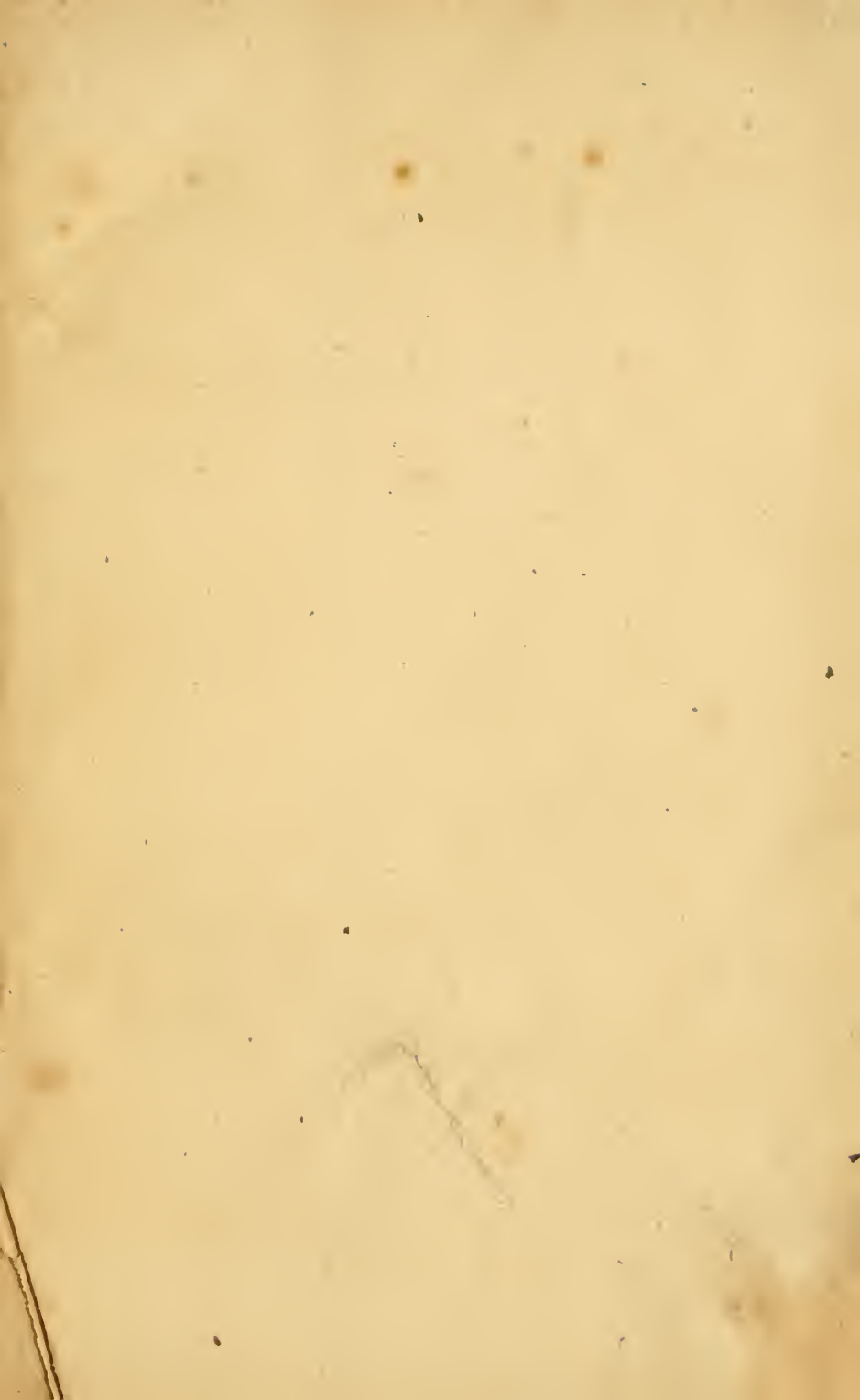
---

Presented by Mr. Samuel Agnew of Philadelphia, Pa.

---

*Agnew Coll. on Baptism, No.*

SCC  
8089







A VIEW  
OF THE  
NATURE, ORDER, & COMMUNION  
OF THE  
CHURCHES OF CHRIST.

AS EXHIBITED

In the New Testament :

---

EXTRACTED FROM

DR. JOHN OWEN'S  
TREATISE ON EVANGELICAL CHURCHES.

---


WITH  
AN APPENDIX ON SCRIPTURE PRESBYTERY.

---

" SHEW THEM THE FORM OF THE HOUSE, and the fashion thereof,  
and all the Ordinances thereof, and all the Laws thereof:--- The  
whole limit thereof shall be most holy."      EZEK. xliii. 10,---12.  
" What is written in the law? How readeft thou?"      LUKE x. 26.  
" Joying and beholding your Order."      COL. ii. 5.

---

EDINBURGH:  
PRINTED BY THOMAS MACCLIESH AND CO.  
ADVOCATES CLOSE.  
M.DCC.XCVII.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2011 with funding from  
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

## PREFACE TO THE ABRIDGMENT.

**A**T a time when the attention of men is so much engaged respecting their natural and political rights, and the constitutions of states, it surely is as much the duty of professed Christians to enquire into those things that pertain to the church, which is the kingdom of Heaven.

At this eventful period, every one ought seriously to consider with whom he stands connected in a church capacity, whether in any sense they form a part of that system of iniquity which, by the signs of the times, we may know Christ is soon to “consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming.”

Since the laws and institutions of Christ, however, are of a very different nature from those of commonwealths and kingdoms, in all our enquiries respecting them we ought to take heed “what manner of spirit we are of.” In order to make progress here we must “become as little children.”

To this it is owing, that the present enquiry concerning religion is accompanied with effects so extremely opposite. Many, we see, after having detected some of those gross impositions which are practised upon mankind, under the most specious pretences, at once become the professed friends of atheism and infidelity; whilst a few, of a very different spirit, are enabled to distinguish between the traditions of men and the commandments of God; and thus obtain a view of the primitive purity and simplicity of Christianity, in opposition to all those systems by which it has been so long corrupted and debased.—But still it is true, that the bulk of professors are either to be characterized by a rigid adherence to the religion of their ancestors, without any examination at all; or else by an avowed indifference about many things which are essential to a church of Christ.

What a pity that any professed Christian should think little of any part of that order which Christ hath instituted! It reflects the greatest dishonour upon him as the Lawgiver of his church. It is a little leaven which has oftentimes leavened the whole lump.

The common idea of Antichrist is not according to truth. Every religious society is so, in proportion as it deviates from the true spirit and design of Christianity.

That power assumed by the rulers, and which is examined and confuted in the ensuing treatise, has a direct tendency to destroy all the beautiful order of a church which is appointed by Christ. The following are a few of its effects: It gives rise to unscriptural inequality in the body—promotes implicit faith by pretending to decide controversies and cases of conscience—

prostitutes the pastoral office, by conferring it on many totally destitute of scripture qualifications—receives members without ever acknowledging the body with which they are to hold communion—keeps people in ignorance respecting the nature of Christian discipline—causes them to perform by *delegation* what they are expressly commanded to do *personally* and from a sense of duty; and too often excommunicates them at pleasure from partaking of gospel ordinances; which deed of itself, however, when it has the sanction of better authority, is one of the most serious things that can befall one in this world.—Where persons have thus, “their fear of God taught by the precepts of men,” it is in vain to expect “love for the truth’s sake.” Neither, can we see the body “edifying itself in love,” where itself is thus so deranged in every part.

With respect to the following treatise, it is not intended to pass any eulogiums on the author. He is sufficiently known by his other writings, and the present publication will speak for itself. To set it up for a standard, or to receive any thing merely on the author’s own authority, would only render us guilty of that which is every where condemned in the book itself, that is, calling any man Master.

The original work seems only to have been once printed, and that in a quarto volume; of which the following pages are the substance. A tedious prolixity, peculiar to the time when DR. OWEN wrote has rendered the Abridgment more difficult. Neither language nor arrangement, however, have been scrupulously adhered to. Where there was a near coincidence of sentiments, although arranged in different parts of the book, they have been thrown together. This is the case more particularly in chapters 8th and 9th.—One or two articles in which Congregationalists themselves have differed, but in which they are now more agreed, are omitted.

The great aim has been to retrench what appeared superfluous, or less connected with the subject, to omit nothing of real importance, to advance nothing without authority, and faithfully to exhibit the general spirit and design of the author. It is therefore hoped this Abridgement will afford nearly as much useful information as the whole would have done; with this advantage, that it will be far more convenient for the bulk of readers, both for its size and moderate price.

Occasional Notes are added; some of them original, and some collected; together with an Appendix on Scripture Presbytery.

To conclude, it has cost the person who abridged it a very considerable degree of labour and time; but should it be the means of leading any to understand better the nature and design of Christian churches, or in any way tend to promote the interests of the kingdom of Christ, he will consider both as amply rewarded.

A LOVER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

EDINBURGH, APRIL 28. 1797..



---

THE  
AUTHOR'S PREFACE  
ABRIDGED.

---

THE differences and contests among professed Christians about the Nature, Power, Order, and Residence of the GOSPEL CHURCH STATE, with the interest of each dissenting party therein, have not only been great and of long continuance, but have also so despised all ways and means of allaying or abatement, that they seem to be more and more inflamed every day, and to threaten more pernicious consequences than any they have already produced, altho' they have been of the worst evils under which the world has for some ages groaned. For the *communion* so much talked of among churches is almost come only unto an agreement and sameness in design for the mutual and forcible *extermination* of one another; at least this is the professed principle of *them* who lay the loudest claim to the name and title, with all the rights and privileges of the Church. Nor are others far remote from the same design who adjudge all, who dissent from themselves, into such a condition, as whersin they are much inclined to think it proper they should be destroyed. That which animates this contest, which gives it life and fierceness, is a supposed inclosure of certain privileges and advantages spiritual and temporal, real or pretended, under the church state contended about. Hence, most men seem to think that the principal, if not their only concern in religion, is of *what church* they are; so that a dissent from them is so evil, that, in comparison with this, almost nothing else hath any evil in it that is worthy of notice.—When this is once well rivetted in their minds by them whose secular advantages lie in the inclosure, they are in readiness to bear a share in all the evils that unavoidably ensue on such divisions. By this means, among others, is the state of the Christian religion, as to its public profession, become at this day so deplorable that it cannot be well expressed. What with the bloody and desolating wars of princes and potentates, and what with the degeneracy of the community of the people from the rule of the gospel in love, meekness, self-denial, holiness, zeal, the universal mortification of sin, and fruitfulness in good works, the profession of Christianity is become but a sad representation of the virtues of him who “calls out of darkness into his marvellous light.” Neither doth there seem at present any design or expectation in the most for the ending of controversies about the church, but force and the sword—which I pray may be averted.

It is therefore high time that a sober enquiry be made, whether there be any *such church state of divine institution* as those contended about: For if it should appear upon trial that there is not, and that all the fierce combats of the parties at variance, with the grievous effects that attend them, have proceeded on a *false supposition*, in adherence whereunto they are confirmed by their interests, some advances may be made towards their abatement. However, if this be not attained, yet directions may be taken from the discovery of the truth, for the use of them who are willing to be delivered from all concern in these fruitless, endless contests, and to reduce their whole practice in religion unto the institutions, rules, and commands of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. And where all hopes of a general reformation seem to fail, it favours somewhat of an unwarrantable severity to forbid *them to reform themselves who are willing* so to do, provided they admit of no other rule in what they so do, but the declaration of the mind of Christ in the gospel, carrying it peaceably towards all men, and firmly adhering unto the *faith once delivered unto the saints*.

To make an entrance into this enquiry, the ensuing discourse is designed; and there can be no way of conducting it, but by a diligent, impartial search into the *nature, order, power, and rule* of the gospel church state, as instituted, determined, and limited by our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles.

When we depart from this rule, so as not to be regulated by it in all instances of fact or pleas of right that afterwards fall out, we are sure to be involved in the confusion of various presumptions, suited unto the various apprehensions and interests of men, and imposed on them from the circumstances of the ages wherein they lived. Yet is it not to be denied that much light respecting the nature of *apostolical* institutions may be received from the declared principles and practices of the *first churches*, for the space of 200 years or thereabouts; but that after this, the churches did insensibly depart, in various degrees, from the state, rule, and order of the apostolical churches, must, I suppose, be acknowledged by all those who groan under the final issue of that gradual degeneracy in the papal antichristian tyranny—for *Rome* was not built in a day, nor was this change introduced at once or in one age, nor were the lesser alterations which began this declension so prejudicial unto the being, order, and purity of the churches, as they proved afterwards through a continued increase in succeeding ages.

The churches might and did by degrees as much fall off from their original constitution, order, and rule, as from their first faith and worship. The causes, occasions, and temptations that tend to the former, are fully as great as those tending to the latter—For,

1. There was no vicious corrupt disposition of mind that began more early to work in church officers than AMBITION, with desire of Preeminence, Dignity, and Rule.—It is not to be suppo-

fed that Diotrephes was singular in his desire of preeminence nor in the irregular actings of his undue, assumed authority.— However, we have one signal instance in him of the deviation that was in the church with him from the rule of its original constitution; for he prevailed so far therein as by his own single episcopal power to reject the authority of the apostles, and to *cast them out of the church* who complied not with his humour. How effectually the same ambition wrought afterwards in many others possessing the same place in their churches with Diotrephes, is sufficiently evident in all ecclesiastical histories.

Ambrose, who lived near the time when such alterations were made in the order and rule of the church, although he could not well discover their first insinuation, nor trace their subtle progress, yet this he judgeth, that it was the pride or ambition of the *doctors of the church* which introduced that alteration in its order. And indeed we see in the event, that all deviations from the original constitution of churches, all alterations in their rule and order, did arise from a compliance with this ambition of their rulers. The original institution, rule, and order being no way suited to the gratification of this ambition, there was a stronger propensity in rulers towards an alteration in these, than unto defection from the purity of faith and worship, which also followed.

2. As the inclination of many lay towards such a deviation, so their interests led them to it, and their temptations cast them upon it. For, to acknowledge the truth to our opponents, according to our apprehension, the rule and conduct of the church, the preservation of its order and discipline, according to its first institution, and the directions given in the scripture about it, is a matter so weighty in itself, so dangerous with respect to its issue, attended with so many difficulties, trials, and temptations, laid under such severe prohibitions of *lordly* power, or seeking either wealth or dignity, that no wise man will ever undertake it, but merely out of a sense of a *call* from Christ to it, and in compliance with that *duty* which he owes him. It is no pleasant thing unto flesh and blood to be engaged in the conduct and oversight of Christ's volunteers, to bear with their manners, to exercise all patience towards them in their infirmities and temptations, to watch continually over their walkings and conversation, and thereon personally to exhort and admonish them all to search diligently and scrupulously into the *rule of the scripture* for their warrant in every act of their power and duty,—under all their weaknesses and miscarriages retaining an high value of them, as of the flock of God which he hath *purchased with his own blood*, with sundry other things of the like kind—all under an abiding sense of the near approach of that great account which they must give of the whole trust and charge committed unto them before the judgment-seat of Christ; for the most part peculiarly exposed unto all manner of dangers, troubles and persecutions, without the least encouragement from wealth, power, or honour.— It is no wonder, therefore, if many in the primitive times were



willing gradually to extricate themselves out of this uneasy condition, and to embrace all occasions and opportunities of introducing insensibly another rule and order into the churches, that might tend more to the exaltation of their own power, authority, and dignity, and free them in some measure from the weight of that important charge, continual care and labour, which a diligent and strict adherence to the first institution of churches would have obliged them unto. This was done accordingly, until the bishops, in the fourth and fifth centuries, began by arbitrary rules and canons to dispose of the flock of Christ, to part and divide them among themselves without their own consent, as if they had conquered them by the sword. But setting no bounds to their ambition, they began to contend among themselves about the preeminence, dignity, and power; in which contest, the bishop of Rome at length remained master of the field, and so obtained a second conquest of the world.

This mystery of iniquity began to work in the days of the apostles, in the suggestions of Satan and the lusts of men, though in a manner latent and imperceptible unto the wisest of men.

It may be proper to take notice of the causes, ways, and manner of the apostacy of churches from their first institution, which happened in the successive ages after the apostles, especially after the end of the second century; before that time, divine institutions with respect to their substance being preserved entire.

Decays of any kind, even in things natural and political, are hardly discernable but by their effects. When an hectic distemper befalls the body, it is oftentimes not to be discerned till it is impossible to be cured. But besides the common difficulty in discovering the rise and progress of declensions and apostacy, these which we treat of were begun and carried on in a *myserious* manner, that is, by the effectual working of the *mystery of iniquity*. On this account, the working of it was almost totally hid in the ages wherein it did work, which renders the discovery of it now the more difficult. Passengers in a ship setting out to sea oftentimes discern not the progressive motion of the ship, and for a while the land rather seems to move from them than the vessel from it. But after a season, the consideration of what distance they are from the port, gives them sufficient assurance of the progress they have made. So this declension of churches from their primitive order and institution, is discoverable rather by measuring the distance between what it left, and what it arrived at, than by express instances of it. But yet it is not altogether like a ship at sea, but rather like the way of a serpent on a rock, which leaves some slime in all its turnings and windings whereby he may be traced; for such marks are left on record of the *serpentine* works of this mystery of iniquity whereby it may be traced, with more or less evidence, from its original interests unto its accomplishment.



The principal causes of this defection were those assigned by Ambrose, viz. the NEGLIGENCE of the people and the AMBITION of the clergy. I speak as to the state, rule, discipline, and order of the church; for with respect to the doctrine and worship of it, there were many other causes and means of their corruption, which belong not to our present purpose. But as to alterations that were begun and carried on in the State, Order, and Rule of the church, they arose from these springs of negligence and ambition, with want of skill and wisdom to manage outward occurrences and incidences, or what alteration fell out in the outward state and condition of the church in this world. For hence it came to pass, that in the accession of the nations in general unto the profession of the gospel, church order was suited and framed according to their SECULAR STATE, when they ought to have been brought into the SPIRITUAL STATE and order of the church, leaving their political state entirely to themselves.—Herein, I say, did the guides of the church entirely miss their rule, and depart from it in the days of Constantine, and afterwards under his successors, when whole towns, cities, yea and nations offered at once to join themselves unto it. Evident it is, that they were not wrought upon by the same power, nor induced by the same motives, nor led by the same means with those who formerly, under persecution, were converted unto the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was quickly manifested in the lives and conversations of the most of them. Hence those who were wise quickly understood that what the church had gained in *multitude*, it had lost in the *beauty* and *glory* of its holy profession. Chrysostome, in particular, complains of it frequently, and in many places cries out, “What have I to do “with this multitude?—a few serious believers are more worth “than them all.” However, the guides of the church thought meet to receive these multitudes; for hereby their own power, authority, dignity, and revenues were enlarged and mightily increased. On this occasion, the ancient and primitive way of admitting members into the church being relinquished, the consideration of their personal qualifications and real conversion to God omitted, such multitudes were received as could not partake in all acts and duties with those particular churches with which they were connected; and the most of them being unfit to be ruled by the power and influence of the commands of Christ on their minds and consciences, it was impossible but that a great alteration would ensue in the original state, order, and rule of the churches. We ought not to cover the provoking degeneracy of the following centuries. The consideration of it is necessary to the vindication of the holy providence of God in the government of the world, and of the faithfulness of Christ in his dealing with his church. For there hath been no nation in the world that publicly received the Christian religion, but hath been wasted and destroyed by the sword of Pagan idolators, or such as are no better than they. Do we think all this was without cause?

Did God give up his inheritance to the spoil of barbarous infidels, without such provocations as had he passed by, he would have acted inconsistent with the holiness and righteousness of his rule? It was not the wisdom, courage, nor the multitude of their enemies, but their own wickedness, superstition and apostacy from the rule of gospel-order, worship and obedience, which ruined all Christian nations.

But to make the matter still more evident, I shall distinctly consider a little the causes above mentioned;—and the first of them is, the *Negligence of the people* themselves. But in the negligence I include the ignorance, sloth, worldliness, decay in gifts and graces, with superstition in several instances, that were the causes of it.

Here a mistake of our opponents may be obviated. They suppose and insinuate that our view of government is democratical or popular; whereas no other interest or share in the government is ascribed by us unto the people but that they may be *ruled by their own consent*, and that they may be allowed to yield obedience in the church unto the commands of Christ and his apostles, given unto them for that end. This share and interest in it, as consisting in an intelligent, voluntary obedience, they neither did nor could forego, without their own sin and guilt, in neglecting the exercise of the gifts and graces which they ought to have had, and the performance of the duties unto which they were bound.

It would seem that government has something in it that has a peculiar sweetness that makes it so much coveted; but if it were apprehended in its own nature, merely as a *duty, a labour and service*, without those advantages of power, dignity, and wealth connected with it,—were it thought to consist in men's giving themselves *wholly to the word and prayer*, in watching continually over the flock, taking the greatest care to do nothing in the church but in the name and authority of Christ, with a constant exercise of all their gifts and graces in all the duties of their office, and that without the least appearance of *dominion*, or the procuring of *dignity*, secular honours, &c. perhaps a share and interest in it, would not be so earnestly coveted and sought after as it is at present.

The negligence of the people, which issued in their unfitness to be disposed of and ruled according to the principles of the first constitution of church order, may be considered either as it gave occasion unto those lesser deviations from the rule, which did not much prejudice the faith and order of the churches, or as it occasioned greater alterations in the ensuing ages.

The great and excessive veneration which they had for their bishops or pastors did probably occasion a neglect of their duty; for by this they were easily induced not only implicitly to leave the management of all church affairs unto them, but also zealously to comply with their mistakes. They were quickly far from esteeming it to be their duty to say unto their pastor, that he

should "take heed unto the ministry which he had received in the Lord to fulfil it," as the apostle enjoins the Colossians to say to Archippus their pastor, chap. iv. 17. They began to think that the glory of implicit obedience was all that was left to them; in consequence of which, some of the clergy assumed to themselves and ascribed to one another *great swelling titles of honour* and names of dignity, wherein they openly departed from apostolical simplicity and gravity. Afterwards, still greater alterations were introduced on the part of the people; for such numbers were received into particular churches, as were inconsistent with the ends of their institution, and the observance of that communion required in them, as will appear when we speak on that head.

Among those multitudes that were added unto the churches, many, if not the most, did come inexpressibly short of the primitive Christians in knowledge, gifts, grace, holiness and uprightness of conversation. And it may be made to appear, that the *accommodation* of the rule, yea, and of the worship of the church unto the ignorance, manners and inclinations of the people, who were then easily won to the profession of Christianity, was one means of the ruin of them both, till they issued in downright tyranny and idolatry.

But the deviation of the churches from their primitive rule and order was owing in a much greater degree to the *ambition* and love of preeminence in many of the *clergy* or rulers of the churches. Nevertheless, I shall almost pass by this at present, as it has been handled by others; and shall shortly mention what also conduced much to the declensions of which we are speaking.

It is evident that there was an alteration made in the state of the church as to its officers; for it ended in popes, patriarchs, cardinals, &c. who were entirely foreign to this state and order of the primitive church. The beginnings of this great alteration were small. Nor is it agreed when first an inequality among the ordinary officers of the church commenced, or the means by which it was effected.

Originally, or in the days of the apostles, there was but one church in any particular city or town, though I grant there were churches in villages also, as will appear afterwards. But though there was but one church in one town or city, yet all the believers, belonging to that church, did not live in that city, but a number of them in the adjacent fields and villages. So Justin Martyr tells us, "that on the first day of the week, when the church had its solemn assemblies, all the members of it in the city, and out of the country, the fields and villages adjacent, met together in the same place." In process of time, these believers in the country did greatly encrease by means of the ministry of the city-church, which diligently attended to the conversion of all sorts of men. In consequence of the conversion of many unto the faith, they planted new churches among them,



not obliging them all constantly to resort to the first church by which they were converted. But those who succeeded them, being hindered by many reasons from thoughts of the multiplication of churches, chose rather to give the believers scattered up and down in the country occasional assistance by presbyters of their own, than to dispose them into a church state and order. But after a while their number greatly increasing, they were under necessity of supplying them with a constant ministry in several divisions. So that these came to be called churches, although continuing in dependence both for supply of officers and for rule on the first or city-church to which they esteemed themselves to belong. Thus it was, that all the bishops of the first churches came by common consent to have distinction from and preeminence above the presbyters, and a rule over those assemblies or churches in the country; and when they met together in the council of Nice, among the first things they decreed was this power of the bishops of great cities over the neighbouring churches, which they had come to possess by this their occasional rise and constitution. In this manner was a difference between bishops and presbyters, between mother and dependent churches introduced, without taking any notice of the departure which was in it from the primitive pattern and institution. But these things happened long after the days of the apostles, namely, in the third and fourth centuries, there being no mention of them before.

Further, there was another cause of this alteration, which took place before that now insisted on.—For in many of those city-churches, especially when the number of believers much encreased, there were many bishops or elders who had the rule of them in common. This is plain in the scripture, and in the ensuing records of church-affairs. And they had all the same office, the same power, and were of the same order. But some time after, they chose one among those who should preside in all church-affairs for order's sake, unto whom after a season the name of *Bishop* began to be appropriated. This I suppose happened pretty early, though without ground or warrant.

The churches encreasing every day in number and wealth, growing insensibly into a form and state exceeding the bounds of their original institution, and becoming *unweildy* as to the pursuit of their ends for mutual edification,—it is not difficult to conjecture how a stated distinction between bishops and presbyters did afterwards ensue.—For as the first elder, bishop or pastor had obtained this small preeminence in the church in which he did preside, and in the assemblies of the adjacent villages, so the management of those affairs of the church which they had in common with others, was *committed* unto him, or *assumed* by him. This gave them the advantage of meeting in Synods and Councils afterwards, wherein they did their *own business* to the purpose. By means of this, in a short time, the people were

deprived of all their interest in the state of the church, so as to be governed by *their own consent*, which indeed they had rendered themselves unmeet to enjoy and exercise; other elders were deprived of that power and authority which is committed unto them by Christ, and thrust down into an order or degree inferior unto that wherein they were originally placed; new officers in the rule of the church, utterly unknown to the scripture and primitive antiquity, were introduced; all charitable donations to the church for the maintenance of the ministry, the poor, &c. were for the most part abused, to advance the revenues of the bishops. But yet all these evils were as nothing in comparison of that dead sea of the Roman tyranny and idolatry, into which at last these bitter waters ran.

I shall forbear, at present, saying any thing more in the way of giving an account of the declension of the churches, least my discourse should be lengthened beyond the design of it; and say a few things with respect to the objections of those who strenuously oppose all manner of reformation of them.

*First*, Our opponents have many severe reflections and reproaches to load us with, for differing in some respects with the first reformers, as if we deemed ourselves wiser and better than they.

As to the first reformers and reformation, the common plea from them is, that they were great, wise, learned, and holy persons;—some of them died martyrs—the work of reformation was greatly owned and blessed of God; and therefore, our *non-acquiescence* therein, but desiring a further reformation of the church than what they saw and judged necessary, is *unreasonable*, and that what we endeavour therein, though never so peaceably, is *schismatical*. But I would answer—

1. None do more bless God for the first reformers and their work than we do; none have an higher esteem of their persons, abilities, graces and sufferings than we; none cleave more firmly to their doctrine, which was the life and soul of the reformation, than we.

2. The titles ascribed unto them of wise, learned, holy, zealous, are fully answered by that reformation of the church in its *doctrine* and *worship* which God wrought by their ministry. But it is no disparagement unto any of the sons of men, any officers of the church, since the days of the apostles to the first reformers or those that succeeded them, to judge that they were not *infallible*, that their work was not absolutely perfect, like the work of God, to which nothing can be added, nor any thing taken away. Wherefore,

3. We are not obliged to make what they did, what they attained to, and what they judged meet as to the government and worship of the church, to be our absolute rule, from which it would be our sin to dissent or depart. They never desired nor designed that it should be so; for to do so would have been to have cast out one Papacy, and to have brought in another.—Had we received a *command from Heaven to hear them in all*

things, it had altered the case ; but this we have received only with respect to Jesus Christ ; and shall therefore in these things ultimately attend only unto what he speaks. And we have several considerations which confirm us in the use and exercise of that *liberty* wherewith Christ hath made us free, to enquire into our duty in these things, and to regulate our duty in them by his word, notwithstanding what was done by our first reformers.

1. *They* did not think themselves obliged, they did not think meet to abide within the bounds and limits of that reformation of the church which had been attempted before them by wise, learned, and holy men, even of this nation. Such was that which was endeavoured by Wickliffe and his followers, unto which many suffered martyrdom, and prepared the way unto those that were to come after. Some thought they were come to the utmost limits of navigation and discovery of the parts of the world before the West-Indies were found out ; and some men, when in any kind they know so much as they can, are apt to think there is no more to be known.

2. The first reformers, both those who underwent martyrdom at home and those who lived in exile abroad, differed among themselves in their judgments and apprehensions about these things now under contest, whereas they perfectly agreed in all doctrines of faith and gospel-obedience. The public records of these differences do so remain, as that they cannot modestly be denied ; and these inform us, the settlement of the church was only an act of the *prevalent party* among them.

3. To what has been said we may add the consideration of the horrid *darkness* which they were newly delivered from—the close adherence of some traditional prejudices unto the best of men in such a condition,—the difficulties and oppositions they met with upon the whole,—their prudence, as they supposed, in endeavouring to accommodate all things to the inclinations and desires of the body of the people, who were extremely immerced in their old traditions ;—all which could not but leave some marks of imperfection on their whole work of reformation.

From these and the like considerations, we are forced to assert the use of our own liberty, light, and understanding in the inquiry after and compliance with the true ORIGINAL STATE AND ORDER of evangelical churches, with our consequent duty in that respect, and not to be absolutely confined to what was supposed to be right, and practised in these things by the first reformers.

*Second*, I shall now say a little to another charge of our opponents arising from our separation from the national church, and that is SCHISM.

We indeed acknowledge schism to be an evil, yea a very great evil ; but are sorry that with some pretended, unproved schism is become almost all that is evil in the churches and their members ; so that let men be *what they will*, drenched, I may say overwhelmed in ignorance, vice, and sin, so they do not separate, they



seem to be esteemed, as to all the concerns of the church, very unblameable. Therefore it may not be amiss in this place to remind those who differ from us, of some of these principles on which we ground our justification in this matter, that they may know what they must overthrow and what they must establish, if they persist in the charge of which we speak.

The first of these principles is, that there is a rule prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ unto all churches and believers, in a due attendance unto which, all the unity and peace which he requireth amongst his disciples do consist.

We acknowledge this to be our fundamental principle ; nor can the rhetoric or arguments of any man affect our consciences, until one of the two following things be proved—either, that the Lord Christ hath given no such rule, as in the observance of which peace and unity may be preserved in the church, or that we refuse a compliance with that rule, in some one instance or other of what he himself hath appointed.

This principle we shall not easily be dispossessed of ; and whilst we are under the protection of it, we have a safe retreat and shelter from the most vehement accusations of schism for non-compliance with a rule that is none of his. All the dispute is, whether we keep unto the rule of Christ or not ; respecting which we are ready to put ourselves upon trial, being willing to teach or learn as God shall help us.

2. We say that *this rule* in general is the rule of faith, love, and obedience, contained and revealed in the scripture, and in particular the commands that the Lord Christ hath given for the order and worship that he requires in his churches. It may seem strange to some, that we suppose the due observance of faith, love, and obedience, to be necessary to the preservation of church peace and unity : But we do affirm with some confidence, that the only real foundation of them does lie hereon ; nor do we value that *ecclesiastical peace* which may be without it, or is neglective of it. Let all the Christian world, or those in it who concern themselves in us, know that this is our principle and our judgment, that no church peace or unity is valued by or accepted with Jesus Christ that is not founded in, that does not arise from, and is the effect of a diligent attendance unto and observance of the entire gospel rule of *faith and obedience*. In the neglect hereof, peace is but carnal security, and unity is nothing but a conspiracy against the rule of Christ. But they who walk according to this rule, need not fear the charge of schism from the fierceness of their enemies. Wherefore we say,

3. Those who depart from this rule, in any material branch of it, are guilty of the breach of church unity in proportion to said deviation. Suppose that men retain a *form of godliness* in the profession of the truth, but *deny the power of it*, acting their habitual lusts and corruptions in a vicious conversation—such persons overthrow the foundation of the churches unity, and we are obliged from such to turn away. The like may be said of those who

live in a constant neglect of any of the commands of Christ, with respect unto the order, rule, and worship of the church, with a contempt of the means appointed by him for their edification. All these, according to the measure of their deviations from the rule of Christ, do disturb the foundation of all church peace and unity. And so we say,

4. That conscience is immediately and directly concerned in no other church unity as such but what is an effect of the rule of Christ, *given to that end*. We know what is spoken concerning obedience unto the guides and rulers of the church, which is a part of the rule of Christ; but we know at the same time that this obedience is required of us only as far as they teach us to observe and do all that he hath commanded; for other commission from him they have none. When this rule is forsaken, and another substituted in the room of it, this quickly turns away the minds of men from a conscientious attendance unto that rule of Christ as the only means of church unity; so that another doth either proceed from men's secular interests, or may easily be accommodated to them. Upon the whole, it is unity of Christ's appointment that schism respects as a sin against, and not uniformity in things of men's appointment.

And now since it is a work of almighty power to reduce Christianity to its original purity and simplicity, which will only be effected by various *providential dispensations* in the world, and renewed effusions of the Holy Spirit from above, which are to be waited for; and seeing all endeavours towards national reformation are attended with unsurmountable difficulties, few churches being either able or willing to extricate themselves from the dust of traditions and time, with the rust of secular interests; I would hope they shall not always be the object of public severity, who, keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of truth and peace, with all sincere disciples of Christ every where, do design nothing but a reformation of themselves and their ways by an universal compliance with the word and will of Christ alone.

But the reduction of Christianity in general, as I have just now said, to its primitive purity and simplicity, separation from the world, and connection with secular interests, so as that it should comprize nothing but the guidance of the souls of men in the life of God towards the enjoyment of him, is a work more to be prayed for to come in its proper season than to be expected in this age; nor do any appear fitted in the least for undertaking such a work, any farther than by their own personal profession and example. And whilst things continue amongst Protestant churches as at present, under the influence of divided secular interests and advantageous mixtures with them, with the reliques of the old GENERAL APOSTACY, by differences in points of doctrine, rules of discipline, orders of divine worship, it is in vain to look for any union or communion among them, in a compliance with any certain rule of uniformity, either in the profession of faith or in the practice of worship and discipline. Nor would such



an agreement among them, could it be attained, be of any great advantage to the important ends of religion, unless a *revival of the power of it in the souls of men* do accompany it. In the meantime the glory of our Christian profession in righteousness, holiness, and a visible dedication of its professors to God, is much lost in the world, innumerable souls perishing through the want of effectual means for their conversion and edification. To attempt *public national reformation*, whilst things *religious and civil* are so involved as they are, the one being rivetted into the legal constitution of the other, is neither the duty nor work of private men; nor will *wise men* be too forward in attempting, unless they had better evidence of means to render it effectual than any that do as yet appear: for the religion of a nation in every form will answer the ministry of it. So that the inquiry before us is as follows—What is the present duty in this state of things, of those private Christians or ministers, who cannot satisfy their consciences with respect to their duty towards God, without endeavouring a conformity to the will of Christ, in the *observance of all his institutions and commands*, confining all their concerns in religion unto things spiritual and heavenly.



THE  
NATURE, ORDER, & COMMUNION  
OF  
Evangelical Churches.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN any thing alledged to belong to religion or the worship of God is proposed to us, our first consideration of it ought to be in that inquiry which our Lord Jesus Christ made of the Pharisees concerning the baptism of John, Whence is it? *From heaven, or of men?* He distributes all things which come under that plea or pretence into two heads, with respect to their origin and efficient cause, namely *heaven* and *men*. These are not only different and distinct, but so contradictory to one another, that in any thing where religion and the worship of God is concerned, they cannot concur as causes of the same effect. What is *of men* is not *from heaven*, and what is *from heaven* is not *of men*: and hence his determination concerning these is, *Every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up*, Mat. xv. 13.

The scriptures every where make mention of the church or churches as of divine institution. But such things have fallen out in the world in latter ages as may justly make men question whether they understand the mind of God aright or not, in what is spoken of them.

For many ages, such things alone were proposed unto the world, and imposed on it for the *only church*, as were from hell rather than from heaven; at least from men, and those none of the best.

The name, pretence, and presumed power of the church or churches have been made use of as the greatest engine for promoting and satisfying the avarice, sensuality, ambition, and cruelty of men that ever was in the world; for the church is so ordered, is of such a make, constitution, and use, that corrupt men need desire no more to the gratification of their lusts, but a share in its government and power; nor hath an interest therein been generally used to any other ends. To this very day, the church, here and there, as it is esteemed, is the greatest means of keeping the Christian religion in its power and purity

out of the world, and a temptation to multitudes of men to prefer the *church* before *religion*, and to persist in their opposition to it. These things being plain and evident to wise men, how could they think that this church state was from heaven and not of men?

By the church (so esteemed) the earth has been soaked with blood, and innumerable holy persons murdered and burnt, for no other reason but because they could not submit their souls and consciences unto her commands, and to be subject to her in all things.

*This pretence of the church is at this day one of the greatest causes of the ATHEISM that the world is filled with.* Men find themselves, they know not how, to belong unto this or that church; they suppose that all the religion that is required of them is no more but what this church suggests unto them; from innumerable prejudices, abhorring to enquire whether there be any other ministerial church state or not: So at length understanding the church to be a political combination for the wealth, power, and dignity of some persons, they cast away all regard of religion, and become professed atheists.

Unto this very day, the woful divisions, distractions, and endless controversies that are among Christians, do all spring from the churches that are in the world. In short, these have been and are the scandal of the Christian religion, and the greatest cause of most of the evils and villanies with which the world hath been filled; and is it any wonder if men question whether they are from heaven or of men?

For my part, I look upon it as one of the greatest mercies that God hath bestowed on any professed Christians in these latter ages, that he hath, by the light and knowledge of his word, disentangled the souls and consciences of any that believe from all respect and trust to such churches, discovering the vanity of their pretences, and wickedness of their practices, whereby they openly proclaim themselves to be not from heaven but of men. Not that he hath led them off from a *church state* thereby, but by the same word revealed *that* to them, which is *pure, simple, humble, holy*; and so far from giving occasion to any of the evils mentioned, that the admittance of it will put an immediate end unto them all. Such shall we find the true and gospel church state to be in the following description of it. He that comes out of the confusion and disorder of these human (and with respect to some of them, worse than human) churches—whoever is delivered from this mystery of iniquity in darkness and confusion, policies and secular contrivances, to obtain a view of the true native beauty, glory, and use of gospel churches, will be thankful for the greatness of his deliverance.

All the above evils, and others innumerable, were effects of and insuperable from the state and being of the Roman church, and other churches also (although the people are of another faith) that are like to it in their make and constitution, exercising

the right, power, and authority which they claim to themselves, by such ways and means as are plainly of this world, and of their own invention; they do leave it highly questionable from whence they are as such. For it may be made to appear that such churches, as far as they are such, are obstrusive of the sole end of all churches, which is the EDIFICATION of *them that do believe*, however any that are of them may promote that end by their own personal endeavours.

But notwithstanding all these things, it is most certain that churches are of a Divine Origin;—that they are the ordinance and institution of Christ. God laid the foundation and necessity of church societies in the law of nature. I speak of churches in general, as they are societies of the human race, one way or other joined and united together for the worship of God. This may be proved from the powers and faculties of the soul, from man's nature being formed for society, &c.

With respect to entering into a church state,—unless persons enter into it by their *voluntary choice and consent*, and out of a sense of their duty unto the authority of Christ in his institutions, they cannot by any other ways or means be so initiated into it as to find acceptance with God therein. The interposition that takes place of custom, tradition, the institutions and ordinances of men, between the consciences of them who belong or would belong unto such a state, and the immediate authority of God, is highly obstrusive of this divine order, and all the benefits of it; for hence it is come to pass, that the most know neither how nor whereby they come to be members of this or that church, but for this reason, that they were *born* where it did prevail, and were accepted.



## CHAP. II.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL CHURCH STATE.

**W**HAT is the origin, nature use, and power—what is the end of the churches or any church—what is the duty of men in it and towards it, is the subject of various contents, and the principal occasion of all the distractions at this day in the Christian world. For the greatest part of those who take to themselves the care and order about these things have interwoven their own secular interests and advantages into such a church state as is meet and suited to preserve and promote these, supposing that religion may be made a trade for outward advantages.

I am now to enquire a little into the special origin and authoritative constitution of the church state.

1. The church state of the New Testament doth not less relate unto and receive force from the light or law of nature than any other state of the church whatever. It is merely from a spirit of contention, that some call on us or others to produce express testimony or institution for every circumstance in the practice of religious duties in the church. Such circumstances are the times and seasons of church assemblies, the order and decency in which all things are to be transacted in them, the bounding of them as to the number of their members, the multiplication of churches when the number of believers exceeds the proportion capable of edification in such societies; what especial advantages are to be made use of in the order and worship of the church, such as methods in preaching, translations and tunes of psalms in singing, continuance in public duties, and the like. But this gives no countenance to the making of laws without any warrant from divine authority, and of no use for general edification; for the things mentioned being themselves of divine institution, are capable of such general directions in and by the light of nature, as may, with ordinary *Christian prudence*, be on all occasions applied unto the use and practice of the church. This the apostle demonstrates in his frequent appeals to the light of nature in things that belong to church order.

2. But such is the special nature and condition of the gospel church state, such the relation of it to the person and mediation of Jesus Christ, such the nature of that especial honour and glory which God designs unto himself therein, (things that the light of nature can give no guidance nor direction about) and besides so different from all that was before ordained in any other church state, and such are the ways, means, and duties of divine worship prescribed in it, that it must have a peculiar divine institution of its own, to evidence that it is from heaven and not of men.

The present state of the church under the New Testament the apostle calls *perfect*, Heb. vii. 11. its perfection, its consummation, that perfect state which God designed for it in this

world; and he denies that it could be brought into that state by the law, or any of the divine institutions that belonged unto it. Heb. xvii. 19. chap. ix. 9. chap. x. 1.

All the dignity, honour, and perfection of the state of the church under the Old Testament depended solely on this, that it was, in the whole and all the particulars of it, of *divine institution*. Hence it was *glorious*, that is, very excellent, as the apostle declares 2 Cor. iii.—and if the church state of the New Testament have not the same origin, it must be esteemed to have a greater glory given unto it by the hand of men, than the other had from the institution of God himself; for a greater glory it hath, as the apostle testifieth. Neither can any man alive give any instance in particular in which there is the least defect in the being, constitution, rule, and government of the gospel church state, for want of divine institution, so that it should be necessary to make a supply to it by the wisdom and authority of men.

3. The *name* of the church under the New Testament is capable of a threefold application, or it is taken in a threefold sense. 1. For the *catholic invisible church*, or society of elect believers in the whole world, really related by faith in him unto the Lord Jesus Christ as their mytical head—2. For the *whole number of visible professors* in the whole world, who, by baptism, the outward profession of the gospel, and obedience unto Christ, are distinguished from the rest of the world—and 3. For such a state as wherein the *worship of God is to be celebrated* in the way of his appointment; and which is to be ruled by the power which he gives it, and according to the *discipline* which he hath ordained. It is the church in the last of these senses whose origin we now enquire after. And I say,

4. The origin of this church state is directly, immediately, and solely from Jesus Christ. He is the sole author, contriver, and institutor of it. When I say it is immediately and solely from *him*, I include the ministry of the apostles, who were employed under him in the carrying on that work unto perfection; and because this is the only foundation of our faith and obedience respecting this church state, namely, that Christ is the alone author of it, the scripture doth not only plainly affirm it, but also declares the grounds of it, why it must be so and whence it is so.

Several things are eminently necessary unto him as the institutor of this church state, with all that belongs thereunto, and the scripture does expressly ascribe them all unto him. The first of these is *right and title*; and this he has on a threefold account: 1. By *donation*, Heb. i. 2. 3. John xvii. 2;—2. By virtue of *purchase*; and this is pleaded as a sufficient reason why we should be wholly at his disposal, and be free from the imposition of men in things spiritual, 1 Cor. vii. 23. “Ye are bought with a price, be ye not the servants of men.”—3. Of *conquest*; for those who were to be disposed by him were both under the power

of his enemies, and were themselves enemies unto him in their minds.

2. *Authority.* As a right and title respects the persons of men to be reduced into a new form of government, so authority respects the rules, laws, &c. to be made, prescribed and established, whereby the *privileges* of this new society are conveyed, and the *duties* of it enjoined unto all that are taken into it.

The apostles themselves never presumed from their own *wisdom* or authority to add or put into this church as of perpetual use, any thing whatever. To this they were obliged by the express words of their commission, Matt. xxviii. 18. 20. They every where disclaim any such authority. They pleaded they were only stewards and ministers, not lords of the faith or obedience of the church, but helpers of its joy, yea the servants of all the churches for Christ's sake, 2 Cor. 4. 5. The gospel church state is absolutely new in its nature, laws, and constitution, unto which all the world are naturally foreigners and strangers. As they have no right unto it as it containeth privileges, so they have no obligation as it prescribes duties.

This authority was first usurped by *Synods* or *Councils of Bishops*. Upon a slight pretence, no way suited or serviceable to their ends, of the *advice* given and determination made by the apostles, with the *elders and brethren* of the church of Jerusalem, in a temporary constitution about the use of Christian liberty, the bishops of the fourth and fifth centuries took upon themselves to make laws and constitutions for ordering the government of the church. It is to be lamented, there should be such a monument left of their weakness, ambition, self interest, and folly, as there is in what remaineth of their constitutions. Their whole endeavour in this kind was at best but the building of wood, hay, stubble, in whose consumption they shall suffer loss, although they should be saved themselves. In thus making laws to bind the whole church about things useless and trivial, no way belonging to the religion taught us by Jesus Christ, for the establishment or increase of their own authority, with the confusions that ensued thereon, in mutual animosities, fightings, divisions, schisms and excommunications, to the horrible scandal of the Christian religion,—in this way, I say, they ceased not until they had utterly destroyed all the order, rule and government, yea the very nature of the church of Christ. The most of them, indeed, knew not for whom they wrought in providing materials for that *Babel* which was raised out of their productions. For after they were hewed and carved, shaped, formed, and gilded, the Pope appeared at the head of it, as it were with these words in his mouth: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power" and for the honour of my majesty?" This was the fatal event of men's invading the right of Christ, and claiming authority to give laws to the church; and till men, earthly potentates, as well as church rulers, can pretend to these things, they may do well to consider how dangerous it is to invade the rights and in-



heritance of Christ, and leave off hunting after a share of power in the framing or forming evangelical churches, or making laws for their rule and government.

But then it is said, that if this be allowed, as all the dignity, power, and honour of the governors of the church will be rejected or despised, so all manner of confusion and disorder will be brought into the church itself. For can it otherwise be, when all power of *law-making*, in the preservation of the dignity of the rulers and order of the church, is taken away?

*Ans.* They do not, in my judgment, sufficiently think of whom and of what they speak who plead in this manner; for the substance of the plea is,—that if the church have its whole frame and order from Christ alone, though men should faithfully discharge their duty in doing and observing all that he hath commanded, there would be nothing in it but confusion and disorder. Whether this becomes that reverence which we ought to have of him, or is suited to that faithfulness which is particularly ascribed in the constitution and ordering of his church, is not hard to determine, and the falsity of it will be clearly proved afterwards.

They ought to remember, I say, how much this assumption of power and manner of speaking is derogatory to the faithfulness of Christ in and over his own house, in which he is compared unto and preferred above Moses, Heb. iii. 6. Now the faithfulness of Moses consisted in this, that he did and appointed all things *according to the pattern shewed him in the mount*.

As to the dignity and honour of the rulers of the church, they are, in the first place, desired themselves to remember the example of Christ himself in his personal ministry here on earth, Matt. xx. 28. "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,"—with the rule prescribed by him thereon, verses 25, 26, 27, "But Jesus called them, and said, ye know that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them, but it shall not be so among you; but whosoever shall be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your *servant*;"—also the injunction given them by the apostle Peter, 1 Epist. v. 5. 3. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but ENSAMPLES to the flock."—And the blessed expressions of the apostolical state by Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 1.—2 Cor. i. 24.—2 Cor. iv. 5.—These passages many prepare their minds for the right management of that honour which is due to them. We may add,—

With respect to the authority of Christ, the scripture gives instances of the use and exercise thereof, which comprize all that is necessary unto the constitution, and ordering of his churches, and the worship of them. *First*, He buildeth his own house, Heb. 3. *Second*, He appointeth offices and officers for rule in his churches, 1 Cor. iii. 1. Rom. xii. 6, 8. *Third*, He gives gifts for the administrations of the church, Ephes. iv. 11—13.

*Fourth*, He giveth power and authority unto them who are to minister and rule in the church; which things must be discussed afterwards.

---

### CHAP. III.

#### THE ESPECIAL NATURE AND FORM OF THE GOSPEL CHURCH STATE APPOINTED BY CHRIST.

THE principal enquiry unto which we have thus far prepared the way, and upon which all that follows does depend, is concerning the ESPECIAL NATURE of that Church State, Rule, and Order, which the Lord Christ hath instituted under the gospel. And here some things must be premised.

1. I design not here to oppose, nor any way to confider such *additions* as men may have judged necessary to be made to that church state which Christ hath appointed, to render it, in their apprehension, more useful to its ends than otherwise it would be. Of this sort there are many things in the world. But our present business is to prove the *truth*, and not to disprove the conceits of men. But so far as our cause is concerned in these, it shall be done by itself, so as not to interrupt us in the declaration of the truth.

2. Whereas there are great contests about COMMUNION with churches, or SEPARATION from them, and mutual charges of impositions and schisms thereon, they must be all regulated by this enquiry, What is that church state which Christ hath prescribed?

In this only is conscience concerned, with respect to all duties of church communion. Neither can a charge of schism be supported against any, but on a supposition of sin, respecting that church state and order which Christ hath appointed.

3. There have been and are in the world several sorts of churches, of great power and reputation, of several forms and kinds, yet contributing aid to each other in their respective stations; as the Papal church, which pretends to be catholic or universal, comprehensive of all true disciples of Christ; patriarchal, metropolitanical, and diocesan churches.

4. There are others who plead for a national church state, arising from an association of the officers of particular churches, in several degrees, which church state they call *classical* and *provincial*, until it extend it itself unto the limits of a whole nation, that is one civil body, depending as such on its own supreme ruler and law. But we say,

5. The visible church state which Christ hath instituted under the New Testament, consists in an ESPECIAL SOCIETY

OR CONGREGATION OF PROFESSED BELIEVERS, joined together according to his mind, with their officers, guides, or rulers, whom he hath appointed, which congregation do or may meet together for the celebration of all the ordinances of divine worship, the professing and authoritatively proposing the doctrine of the gospel, with the exercise of the discipline prescribed by himself, unto the glory of Christ in the preservation and propagation of his kingdom in the world, and their own mutual edification.

The things observable in this description are, *1st*, The *matter* of this church, namely, of what it is composed, and that is, *visible believers*—*2dly*, The *form* of it, a society or congregation voluntarily coalesced according to the mind of Christ—*3dly*, The *end* of it in general is, local communion in all the ordinances and institutions of Christ, in obedience unto him, and for their own edification,—in particular, the preaching of the word to the edification of the church itself and the conversion of others, administration of the sacraments, the preservation and exercise of evangelical discipline, and visibly to profess their subjection to Christ in the world by the observance of his commands. The bounds and limits of this church are taken from the number of the members, which ought not to be so small as that they cannot observe and do all that Christ hath commanded in due order, nor yet so great as not to meet together for the ends of the institution of the church. This church, in its complete state, consists of its rulers or *guides*, and the community of the faithful. Unto such a church, and every one of these, belongs of right all the privileges, promises, and power that Christ doth grant unto the church in this world. These and sundry other things of like nature shall be spoken to in course.

At present I shall proceed to two things—*1st*, to prove that Christ hath appointed this church *state* under the gospel, namely of a PARTICULAR or SINGLE CONGREGATION; *2dly*, that he hath appointed *no other* church state that is inconsistent with this, much less that is destructive of it.

1. Christ appointed that church state which is *meet and accommodated unto all the ends which he designed in his institution of a church*—but such alone is that church-form and order that we have proposed. In Christ's institution of the church, it was none of his ends that some men might thereby be advanced to rule, honour, riches, or secular grandeur, but the direct contrary, Matth. xx. 25, &c. Nor did he do it that his disciples might be ruled by force or the laws of men, or that they should be obstructed in the exercise of any graces, gifts, or privileges that he had purchased for them, or would bestow upon them; and to speak plainly, (let it be despised by them that please) that cannot be of any great service to this church state which is not suited to guide, excite, and direct the exercise of all evangelical graces to the glory of Christ in a due manner; because, to propose peculiar and proper objects for these graces, to give

peculiar motives to them, to limit the seasons and circumstances of their exercise, and regulate the manner of the performance of the duties that arise from them,—is one principal end of the institution of churches.

It would be too long to make a particular enquiry into all the ends for which the Lord Christ appointed this church state, which indeed are all the duties of the gospel, either in themselves or in the manner of their performance. We may reduce them unto these three general heads.

*First*, The *professed subjection* of the souls and consciences of believers unto his authority, in their observance of his commandments. He requireth that all who are baptized in his name be taught to do and observe all things whatsoever he commanded, Matth. xxviii. 18. 19. 20. And God is to be glorified not only in their subjection, but in their *professed* subjection unto the gospel of Christ, 2 Cor. xix. 13. Having given an express charge unto his disciples, to make public profession of his name, and not to be deterred from it by shame or fear of any thing that may befall them in so doing, and that on the penalty of his disowning them before his heavenly Father. Matt. viii. 33—38. Matt. x. 33. he hath appointed this church-state, as the way and means whereby they may, jointly, and visibly make profession of this their subjection to him, dependence on him, and freedom in the observance of all his commands. He will not have this done singly and personally alone, but *in society* and conjunction. Now this cannot be done in any imaginable church state, in which the members of the church cannot meet together for this end. This they can only do in such a church as is *Congregational*.

*Secondly*, The *joint celebration* of all gospel ordinances is the great and principle end of the evangelical church state. Man was made for society in things natural and civil, but especially in things spiritual, or such as concern the worship of God. Hereon depends the necessity of particular churches, or societies for divine worship. And this is declared to be the end of the churches instituted by Christ, Acts ii. 42. 1 Cor. xi. 20. 1 Cor. v. 4. 5. 1 Tim. ii. 12. as also of the institution of officers in the church, for the solemn administration of the ordinances of this worship. And the reasons of this appointment of church assemblies, are intimated in the scripture; as, *1st*, that it might be a way for the joint exercise of the graces and gifts of the spirit, as was in general before mentioned. The Lord Christ gives his grace and his gifts in great variety of measures, Ephel. iv. 7. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given unto every man to profit withal.” 1 Cor. xii. 7, 8. He gives neither of them merely for *themselves*. Saving grace is given first for the good of him that receives it, but respect is also had in it to the good of others; and the Lord Christ expects such an exercise of it, as may be to the advantage of others. The first end of gifts is the edification of others; and all that do receive them are thereby *stewards of the manifold grace of God*, 1 Pet. 4. 10. Wherefore



in order to the due exercise of these gifts and graces unto his glory and their proper ends, he hath appointed particular congregations, in whose assemblies alone they can be duly exercised. *2dly*, Hereby all his disciples are mutually edified; that is, encreased in knowledge, faith, love, fruitfulness in obedience, and conformity unto himself. This the apostle affirms to be the especial end of all churches, their offices, officers, gifts, and order, Ephes. iv. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and again, ii. 19. No church state that is not immediately suited unto this end, is of his institution; and though others besides these particular congregations may in general pretend unto it, it were to be wished they were not obstructive of it. *3dly*, That he might hereby express and testify his promised presence with his disciples unto the end of the world, Matth. xxviii. 20, and xviii. 20. Rev. i. 13. It is in their church assemblies, and in the performance of his holy worship, that he is present with his disciples, according unto his promise. *4thly*, In these churches, thus exercised in the worship of God, he gives us a resemblance and representation of the great assembly above, who worship God continually before his throne, which is too large a subject here to insist upon.— And to manifest that assemblies of the *whole church at once and in one place*, for the celebration of divine worship, is of the essence of a church, without which it hath no real being, when God had instituted such a church form, as that wherein all the members of it could not ordinarily come together every week for this end; he ordained that for the preservation of their church state, three times in the year the males (which was the circumcised church) should appear together in one place, to celebrate the most solemn ordinances of his worship, Exod. xxiii. 14. chap. xxxiv. 23. Deut. xvi. 16. All those difficulties which arose from the extent or the limits of that church unto the whole nation being now done away, these meetings of the whole church for the worship of God become a continual duty; and when they cannot be observed in any church, the state or kind of it is not instituted by Christ.

The *third* end of the institution of the gospel church state is the exercise and preservation of the *discipline* appointed by Christ to be observed by his disciples. The ancients do commonly call the whole Christian religion by the name of the *discipline of Christ*; that is, the faith and obedience which he hath prescribed to them, in opposition to the rules and prescriptions of philosophical societies; and it is that without which the glory of the Christian religion can in no due manner be preserved.

The nature of it shall be afterwards fully treated of. At present I shall only speak of the ends of it, or what it is that the Lord Christ designeth in the institution of it; and these things may be referred unto four heads.

1. The discipline of Christ was designed for the preservation of the *doctrine* of the gospel in its purity, and *obedience* unto

his *commands* in its integrity. For the first, the scripture is full of predictions, all confirmed in the event, that after the days of the apostles there should be various attempts to corrupt and pervert the doctrine of the gospel, and to bring in pernicious errors and heresies. To prevent, reprove, and remove them is no small part of the ministerial office in the dispensation of the word. But whereas those who taught such perverse things did for the most part arise in the churches themselves, Acts xx. 30. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John, ii. 19; as the preaching of the word was appointed for the rebuke of these doctrines, so this *discipline* was ordained in the church, with respect to the persons by whom they were taught, Rev. ii. 2, 14, 20. 3 John viii. 9. Gal. v. 12; and so also it was with respect unto schisms and divisions that might fall out in the church. The way of suppressing these things by external force, by the sword of magistrates, in prisons, fines, banishments, and death, was not then thought of, nor directed unto by the Lord Jesus Christ; for it is highly dishonourable unto him, as if the ways of his appointment were not sufficient for the preservation of his own truth, but that his disciples must betake themselves unto the secular powers of this world, who for the most part are wicked, profane, and ignorant of the truth.

To this belongeth the preservation of his *commands*, in the integrity of obedience. For he appointed that hereby care should be taken of the ways, walking, and conversation of his disciples, that in all things it should be such as became the gospel. Hence the exercise of this discipline he ordained to consist in exhortations, admonitions, reproofs of any that should offend in things moral or of his special institution, with the total rejection of them that were obstinate in their offences; as we shall see afterwards.

2. Another end of this discipline was to *preserve love* among his disciples. This was that which he gave special charge about unto all that should believe in his name, taking the command of it to be his own in a peculiar manner, and declaring our observance of it to be the principal pledge and evidence of our being his disciples. For though mutual love be an *old commandment*, belonging both unto the moral law and sundry injunctions under the Old Testament; yet the degrees and measure of it, the ways and duties of its exercise, the motives unto it, and reasons for it, were wholly his own, whereby it likewise becomes a *new commandment*.

For the preservation and continuance of this love, which he lays so great weight upon, was this discipline appointed, and to which, in different respects, it effectually contributes; as in preventing or removing of offences that might arise among believers to the interruption of it, Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17. And in that watch over each other, with mutual exhortations and admonitions, without which this love, let men pretend what they

please, will not be preserved. That which keepeth either life or soul in Christian love, consists in the mutual exercise of those graces, and the discharge of those duties, whereby they may be partakers of the fruits of love in one another. And for the most part, those who pretend highly unto the preservation of love, by their coming to the same church, who dwell in the same parish; have not so much as the very shadow of it. In the discipline of the Lord Christ it is appointed that this love, so strictly enjoined by him, so expressive of his own wisdom and love, should be preserved and increased, by the due and constant discharge of the duties of mutual exhortation, admonition, prayer, and watchful care over one another, Rom. xv. 14. 1 Thes. v. 11, 12. 2 Thes. iii. 15. Heb. iii. 12, 13. chap. xii. 15, 16.

3. A third end of it is, that it might be a due representation of his own love, care, tenderness, patience, and meekness, in the acting of his authority in his church. Where this is not observed in the exercise of church discipline, it is highly injurious and dishonourable unto him. For all church power is in him, and derived from him; nor is there any thing of that nature which belongs unto it, but must be acted in his name, and esteemed, both for the manner and matter of it, his act and deed. For men, therefore, to pretend to exercise this discipline, in a worldly spirit, with pride and passion, by tricks of laws and canons in courts foreign to the churches themselves, which are pretended to be under this discipline, is a woful and scandalous representation of Christ's wisdom, care, and love towards his church. But the discipline which Christ hath ordained must be exercised in meekness, patience, gentleness, evidence of zeal for the good, and compassion for the souls of men, with gravity and authority, so as that therein all the holy affections of his mind towards his church or any in it, in their mistakes, failings, and miscarriages, may be duly represented, as well as his authority exercised among them. Isaiah xl. 11—2 Cor. x. 1—Gal. v. 22, 23—1 Thes. ii. 7—2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26—Jam. iii. 17—1 Cor. xiii.

4. It is in part appointed to be an *evidence* and *pledge* of the future judgment, in which the whole church shall be judged before the throne of Jesus Christ. For in the exercise of this discipline Christ is on his own judgment-seat in the church; nor may any man pronounce any sentence, but what he believeth Christ himself would pronounce were he visibly present, and what is according to his mind, as declared in his word. Hence Tertullian calls the sentence of excommunication in the church, a representation of the future judgment.

In all that degeneracy which the Christian professing church hath fallen into, in faith, worship and manners, there is no instance can exceed the corruption of this divine institution. For that which was the honour of Christ and his gospel, and a true way of representing him in the glory of his wisdom and love,

and for the exercise of all graces in the church, in order to the blessed ends now declared, was turned into a *domination*, according to the arts and ways of the worst of law courts, by persons entirely void of any just pretence to the least interest in church power, on causes and for ends foreign to the discipline of the gospel, by a tyranny over the consciences, and over the persons of the disciples of Christ, to the dreadful scandal of the gospel, and the rule of Christ in his church.

As these are the general ends of the institution of a church state under the gospel, and are conducive unto them, it is a great divine ordinance for the glory of Christ, with the edification and salvation of them that believe. Wherefore that church state which is suited to these ends, is that which is appointed by Christ; and whatever kind of church or churches is not so, primarily and as such, are not of his appointment. So it is in CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES ALONE that these things can be observed; for unto all of them are required assemblies of the whole church, and wherever they are, that church is congregational. No such churches as these mentioned before in any way *national*, are capable of the discharge of these duties, or attaining of these ends. If it be said, that what they cannot do in themselves, as that they cannot together in one place profess and express their subjection unto the commands of Christ, cannot have personal communion in the celebration of gospel ordinances of worship, nor exercise discipline in one body and society; yet they can do the same things otherwise, partly in single congregations appointed by themselves, and partly in such ways for the administration of discipline as are suited to their state and rule, that is, by *ecclesiastical courts*, with *jurisdiction* over all persons or congregations belonging to them; I say, if they argue in this manner, it will do no service to their cause. For those particular congregations in which these things are to be observed, are *churches*, or they are *not*. If they are *churches*, they are of Christ's appointment, and we obtain what we aim at; nor is it in the power of any man to deprive them of any thing that belongs unto them as such; if they are *not*, but inventions and appointments of their own, then that which they say is to this purpose,—that what is absolutely necessary to the due observance of the worship of God, and to all the ends of churches, being not appointed by Christ, is by them provided for and ordained; which is to exalt themselves in wisdom and care above him, and to place themselves in a nearer relation to the church than himself.

Further, a church is such a body or society as hath spiritual power, privileges, and promises annexed to it. That which hath not these as such is no church. The particular congregations mentioned have this power, with privileges and promises belonging to them, or they have not. If they have not, they are no churches, at least no complete churches, and there are no church-



es in the earth in which those things can be done for which the being of churches was ordained. If they have such power, I desire to know from whence they have it—if from Christ, then they are of his institution; and who can divest them of that power, or any part of it?

The very signification of the word doth determine the sense of it to be a particular congregation; and shews, that the whole body, its rulers and those who are ruled, do assemble together *in one place*, for the administration of gospel ordinances and the exercise of discipline; and on that account, can neither be diocesan, provincial, nor national. For although the essence of the church does not consist in actual assemblies, yet these are absolutely necessary unto it in its exercise.

Hence, in the Old Testament, with reference to a church, the Hebrew verb is to “congregate,” to “assemble,” to “call and meet together,” and nothing else. The LXX Interpreters render it mostly by EKKLESIASTO, to “congregate in a church assembly;” and sometimes by words of the same import, as SUNISTEMI, EPISUNAGO; so they do the Hebrew noun by SUNAGOGE, EKKLESIA, seldom by any other word, but where they do, it is always of the same signification. Wherefore, this word in the Old Testament signifies nothing but a congregation that assembles for the ends and uses of it, and acts its duties and power, so doth EKKLESIA also in the New Testament. It may be sometimes applied to that, the essence of which is not denoted thereby, as the church catholic invisible, which is mystical; but wherever it is used to denote an outward visible society, it doth at the same time point out their assemblies together in one. It is frequently used for an actual assembly, Acts xix. 32, 39, 40.—1 Cor. xiv. 3, 4. which was the signification of it in all Greek writers. And it is expressly affirmed, that *it met together in the same place*, 1 Cor. xiv. 23. Wherefore that society which does not congregate, the whole body of which doth not meet together to act its powers and duties, whatever other sort of body it may be, neither is nor can be called a Church.

In this sense, namely of a congregation, is the same original word used, when the first intimation is given of an evangelical church state with order and discipline, Matth. xviii. 17, “If he shall neglect to hear them, tell the church,” &c. There have been so many contests about the sense of these words and the interpretation of them, so many various and opposite opinions about them, that some would argue from thence that nothing could be directly proved from them, nor any certain account of the state and duty of the church be thence collected. But nothing can be insinuated more false and absurd, nor which more tendeth to the overthrow of the whole authority of the scripture. For if when men are seduced by their interests or otherwise to multiply false expositions of any place of scripture, and to contend earnestly about them, so that thereby, with respect

to us, they lose their instructive power and certain determination of the truth, we should quickly have no bottom or foundation for our faith in the most important articles of our religion. But all the various pretensions of men, such as the Pope, a general council, the civil magistrate, the Jewish synagogue, a company of arbitrators, (to all which the above passage has been said to refer) are nothing but so many instances of what interest, prejudice, corrupt lucre, and ambitious designs, with a dislike of the truth, will bring forth. To me it seems strange, that any impartial man reading this context, can take *the church* in this place in any other sense, but for such a society, as to which an offending and offended brother or disciple of Christ might and ought to belong, to the body of which they might address themselves for relief and remedy, or the removal of offences, by virtue of the authority and appointment of Jesus Christ.

It were an endless task, and not suited to our present design, to examine the various pretensions to the church in this place.

Therefore I shall only make a few observations from the context, which will sufficiently prove what sort of church it is that is here intended.

1. The rule and direction given by our Saviour in this place to his disciples doth not concern civil injuries as such, but such sins as have *scandal* and offence in them, either causing other men to sin, or giving them offence, whereby the exercise of love in mutual communion may be hindered. Private injuries may be respected herein, but not as *injuries*, but so far as they are scandalous, and matter of offence to them who know them; and this appears from the word here used,—for HAMARTANO only respects scandal to them against whom that sin is said to be, 1 Cor. viii. 11, 12. civil injuries as such being expressed by ADIKEO and APOSTEREOMAI, 1 Cor. vi. 8, 9. But to sin against Christ in the light of their consciences, is to sin against a brother, as mentioned in the place under consideration. Further, it is evident in the context, that our Saviour is treating directly about all sorts of scandals and offences, or sins or occasions of falling, stumbling and missing, and so of perishing, unto others, giving rules and directions about them, from verse 8. to these words in which direction is given about their cure and removal. Two things he ascribes to these scandals; that weak Christians are *despised* in them, verse 10. and they that are in danger to be *destroyed* or lost forever by them, verse 14. which gives us a true account of the nature of scandalous offences.

Where the same rule is again recorded, the words used enforce this application of them, Luke xvii. 1, 2, 3; and what our Lord expresseth by SKANDALISE, verse 2. he expresseth by HAMARTE HES SE, “sin against thee,” verse 3, and this is plain from the direction which he gives about this EPHIMASON AUTO, “rebuke him,” this word being the only word used for the rebuke given, or to be given to a scandalous offender, 2 Cor. ii. 6.

It doth not seem a direction suited to that intense love which the Lord Christ requires in all his disciples one towards another, nor the nature of that love in its exercise, as it is described in 1 Cor. xiii, that for a *private injury* as such, done to any man, without respect to sin against God therein, which is the *scandal*, he should follow his brother so far as to have him cast out of the communion of all churches and believers, which yet in case of sin unrepented of is a necessary duty.

2. The rule here prescribed was for the use of the disciples of Christ in all ages, and is not to be confined unto any present case, or the present season. For there was no such case at present, no mutual offence among any of his disciples, that should require this determination of it; but was given with respect to what might afterwards fall out in the church. There was no need of any such direction at that time, because Christ himself was then constantly present with them, in whom all church power did reside. Accordingly, when any of them did offend unto scandal, he did himself rebuke them, Matt. xvi. 22, 23; and when any *mutual offence* fell out among them, he instructed them and directed them unto the way of love, doing what any church could do; and much more, Matt. xx. 24—28. This case about which the rule was given, our Saviour foreknew and foretold would fall out in the church in future generations to the end of the world. It doth so every day, and will do so whilst men are in an imperfect state here below. Nor 's there any thing in which the church, with respect to its order, purity and edification, is more concerned, for they cannot be preserved in any church where a certain rule for the cure and healing of offences, either is not, or is neglected. It is therefore fond to suppose that our Saviour should prescribe this rule for *that season* in which there was no need of it, and not for those times wherein the church could not subsist in order without it.

3. The church here spoken of is a Christian church. For since it has been proved it concerned succeeding times, there was nothing in those times that could pretend to the name of a church, but only a Christian church. The Jewish synagogues had an utter end put to them, so that an address to any of them in this case was not only useless but unlawful, because it is such a church as can exercise authority in the name Christ, over his disciples, and such as in conscience they should be bound to submit themselves unto. For the reason given respecting the contempt of the judgment and sentence of the church, in case of offence, is their power of Spiritual binding and loosing, which is committed by Christ unto them, and so he adds immediately verse 18. "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," which is a privilege of a Christian church alone.

4. It is a visible PARTICULAR CONGREGATION alone that is here intended. For as to the church, in other accep-



tance of that name, either the catholic invisible church, or the whole body of professed believers throughout the world, it is utterly impossible for this duty to be observed towards it. We have proved that the first and most proper signification of the word is a *single* congregation, assembling together for its duties and enjoyments. Wherever, therefore, the church in general is mentioned, without the addition of any circumstance that may limit it to any other signification, it must be interpreted such a particular church or congregation. The persons intended, offending and offended, must belong to *that society* to which the address is to be made; or else the one party may justly decline the judicatory applied to, and so frustrate the process. And it must be a church to which they are known in their circumstances, without which it is impossible that a right judgment in sundry cases, can be made in point of offence. It is a church of an easy address; *go tell the church*, which supposeth that free and immediate access which all the members of a church have to that whole church of which they are members. Wherefore it is said, "tell the church;" not *a church*, but *the church*, namely to which thou and thy brother do belong.

One end of this direction is, that the offending and offended parties may continue together in the communion of the same church in love, without dissimulation, which thing belongs unto a particular congregation. The meaning is not tell the diocesan bishop, for whatever churches he may have under his rule, yet is not he himself a church. Nor, lastly, is it a presbytery or association of the elders of many particular congregations that is intended. For the power claimed in such associated presbyteries, is with respect to what is already in or before particular congregations, and which, as is supposed, they have not either wisdom or authority finally to determine. But this supposeth, that the address, in the first place, is to be made to a particular congregation, which therefore is first and properly here intended.

These things are plain and familiar to the common understandings of all believers, whose minds are any way exercised about them, as indeed are all things which belong to the discipline of Christ. Arguments pretendedly deep and learned, but really obscure, and perplexed with logical terms and distinctions, applied to things thus plain and evident in themselves, serve only to involve and darken the truth. It is plain in the text quoted that there was a church state for Christians, then designed by Christ, which afterwards he would institute and settle—that all true disciples were to join and unite themselves in some such church as might be helpful to their love, order, peace and edification.—That among the members of these churches offences would arise, which in themselves tend to pernicious events.—That if these offences could not be cured and taken away, so that love without dissimulation might be continued a-



among all the members of the churches, an account of them at last was to be given to that church or society of which the parties concerned were members,—that this church should hear, determine, and give judgment, with advice in the cases so brought, for the taking away and removal of all offences,—that this determination of the church is to be rested in as valid, on the penalty of a deprivation of all the privileges of the church, that these things are the institution and appointment of Christ himself, whose authority in them all is to be submitted unto, and which alone can cast one that is a professed *Christian* into the condition of an *heathen* or a *publican*.

These things are plain and easy to the understanding of the meanest of the disciples of Christ, as it is meet that all things should be in which their daily practice is concerned. But it is not easily to be expressed, into what horrible perplexities and confusions they have been wrested in the church of Rome; nor how those who depart from the plain obvious sense of the words, and love not the practice to which they direct, do lead themselves and others in ways and paths that have neither use nor end. From the corruption and abuse of the holy institution of our Lord Jesus Christ here intended, so many powers, faculties, courts, jurisdictions, &c. the very names of which are uncouth, horrid, and foreign to religion, have proceeded, as may fill the mind with astonishment. But all this is fallen out by men's departing from the simplicity of the gospel, and a contempt of that sense of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is plain and obvious unto all who desire not only to hear his words, but also to observe his commands.

Our third argument is taken from the *nature* and *order* of the churches instituted by the apostles, as it is expressed in the scripture, for they were all of them congregational, and of no other sort. This the ensuing considerations will make evident.

1. There were *many* churches planted by the apostles in very small provinces,—no to insist on the churches of Galatia, Gal. i. 1. concerning which it is no where intimated that they had any one head or mother church; nor of those of Macedonia, distinct from that of Philippi. For upon the first coming of Paul to Jerusalem, after his conversion, which was *three years*, Gal. i. 18. in the fourth year after the ascension of Christ, there were churches planted in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, Acts ix. 31. Neither of the two last provinces was equal unto one ordinary diocese; yet there were *churches* in both of them, and that in so short a time after the first preaching of the gospel, that it is impossible they should be conceived to be any other but single congregations.

2. These churches were such, that the apostles appointed in them ordinary elders and deacons, that might administer all ordinances to the whole church, and take care of all the poor, Acts xiv. 23. and xx. 28. Now the care, inspection, and la-

hour of ordinary officers can extend itself no farther than to a particular congregation. No man can administer all ordinances to a diocesan church ; and this ordaining elders in *every* church, is the same with ordaining them in *every* city, Tit. i. 5. that is, in every town in which there was a number converted to the faith, as is evident from Acts xiv. 23. It was in towns and cities ordinarily that the gospel was first preached and received ; such believers being congregated and united in the profession of the same faith, and subjection to the authority of Christ, did constitute such a church state as, according to the will of Christ, they should have bishops (or elders) and deacons ordained amongst them ; and were therefore, as to their state, such churches as he owned.

3. It is said of most of these churches expressly that they respectively *met* together in *one place*, or had their assemblies of the whole church, for the discharge of the duties required of them, which is peculiar unto congregational churches only ; so did the church at *Jerusalem* on all occasions. Acts xv. 12, 22. chap. xxi. 22. see also chap. v. 11. chap. vi. 1. The objection is of no force which is raised from the multitude of them that are said to believe, and consequently were of that church, so that they could not assemble together ; for since the scripture says expressly that the *multitude of the church* did come together, it is scarce fair for us to say they were such a multitude as that they could not come together in one place. And it is evident that the great numbers of believers that are said to be at Jerusalem, were there only occasionally, and were not fixed in that church, for, many years after, a small village beyond Jordan could receive all that were so fixed in it. The church at Antioch gathered together in one assembly, to hear Paul and Silas, Acts xiv. 27. This church thus called together is styled *the multitude*, chap. xv. 30. The whole church of Corinth did assemble together in one place, both for solemn worship, and the exercise of discipline, 1 Cor. v. 4. chap. xiv. 25, 26. chap. xi. 17—20.

It is no way necessary to plead any thing in illustration, or for the confirmation of these testimonies. They all speak positively in a matter of fact, which will admit of no debate, unless we make exceptions to the veracity of their authors, and they are of themselves sufficient to establish our assertion. For whatever may be the state of any church as to its officers and rule, in whatever order it be disposed ordinarily or occasionally for its edification, so long as it is its duty to assemble with all its members *in one place*, it is a *single congregation*, and no more.

4. The duties prescribed to all church members in the writings of the apostles, to be diligently attended to by them, are such as either in their nature, or the manner of their performance, cannot be attended to and duly accomplished, but in a *particular congregation*. This I shall attend to immediately, and therefore only mention it in this place.

These things being so plainly and frequently asserted in the scripture, it cannot be questionable to any impartial mind, but that *particular churches* or congregations, are of divine institution; and consequently that to them the whole power and privileges of the church do belong; for if they do not so, whatever they are, churches they are not. If therefore any other church state be supposed, we may well require that its name, nature, use, power, and bounds, be pointed out from the scriptures.

---

#### CHAP. IV.

##### CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES ALONE SUITED TO THE ENDS OF CHRIST IN THE INSTITUTION OF HIS CHURCH, AND NO OTHER CHURCH STATE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

**I**T is necessary that such a state as pretends to a divine origin, not only be not contrary to or inconsistent with the ends for which Christ instituted a church state, but also that it be effectually conducive to it, and in its place necessary to that purpose; nor is there a more forcible argument against any pretended church state, rule, or order, than that it is obstructive to the souls of men in attaining the proper ends of their whole institution. These ends were in general before declared, which I shall not here repeat, but only attend a little to those that are usually pleaded as not attainable by congregational churches, or at least that they are not suited to their attainment.

The *first* of these is mutual love among all Christians, all the disciples of Christ. By the disciples of Christ, I mean them and them only who profess faith in his person and doctrine, and to hear him, or to be guided by him alone, in all things that appertain to the worship of God, and their living to him. If there are any, called Christians, who, in these things, chuse other guides, call other ministers and hear them, we must pass over them in our present consideration. But what is now asserted is necessary to constitute a true disciple of Christ. To all these, his great command is mutual love among themselves; and such weight doth he lay on this command, that he declares the manifestation of the glory of God, his own honour, and the evidence to be given to the world that we are his disciples, depend upon our obedience therein.

To express and exercise this love in all the acts and duties of it among his disciples, was one end of his appointing them to

walk in church relation to one another, wherein this love is the *bond of perfectness*; and the loss of this love as to its due exercise, is no less a pernicious part of the fatal apostacy of the churches, than is the loss of faith and worship. For, in consequence of this, Christendom, as it is usually called, is become the greatest stage of hatred, rage, wrath, bloodshed, and mutual desolations in the whole world; so that we have no way to answer the objections of the Jews, arguing against us from the promises of love and peace in the kingdom of the Messiah, but by granting that all these things arise from a rebellion against his rule and kingdom. Now, this love in its exercise is eminently preserved in the order of particular churches. For,

1. The principle of their collection into such societies, next to that of faith in Jesus Christ, is *love to all the saints*; for their conjunction being with some of them as such only, they must have a love to all that are so; and none of them would join in such societies, if their so doing did in any thing impair their love unto all the disciples of Christ, as occasion doth require; and if they are defective in this catholic love, it is their fault, contrary to the rule and end of their institution.

2. To the constant expression and exercise of this love, there are required present suitable objects to all the acts and duties of it;—a description of these acts and duties;—rules for the right performance and exercise of them; and an end to be attained in their discharge. All these things hath the Lord Christ provided for his disciples in the constitution and rule of these churches; and hath appointed a due attendance to them as the proof of their love to all his disciples. It would be too long to go over these things in particular; I shall only add, what may easily be defended, that gospel love will never be recovered and restored to its primitive glory, until particular churches or congregations are reformed, and till they are reduced to that exercise of *love without dissimulation*, which is required in all their members among themselves. For whilst men live in envy and malice, be hateful and hating one another, or whilst they live in an open neglect of all those duties which the Lord Christ hath appointed to be observed towards the members of that society to which they belong, as a pledge and evidence of their love to all his disciples, no such thing can be attained. And thus it is in most parochial assemblies, who, in the midst of their complaints of the breach of love and union, by some men's withholding communion with them,—yet, besides the common duties of civility and neighbourhood, neither know nor practise any thing of that spiritual love, delight and communion that ought to be amongst them as members of the same church. We boast not ourselves of any great attainment of this kind; we know how far short we come of that fervent love that flourished in the first churches—but this we say, that there is no way to recover it, but by that state and order of particular churches which we propose, and desire to adhere unto.



But pretences to the contrary are vehemently urged and, clamours to that purpose are loud and many. For it is said, this way of setting up particular congregations is that which hath caused endless divisions; and by men's not meeting as they used to do, &c. all love is lost among them. To this I answer,—

1. This objection, so far as I am able to observe, is mostly in the mouths of those who seem to know very little of the *nature* and *duties* of that love which our Lord Jesus Christ enjoins in the gospel, nor give any considerable evidence of their living, walking, and acting in the power of it; and as to what they fancy to themselves under that name, we are not concerned in it.

2. With respect to a joint participation of the same ordinances at the same time, within the same walls, this was diligently observed in the Papacy, when all true evangelical love, faith and worship were lost. Yea, this kind of communion and conjunction, added to an implicit dependence on the authority of the church, was substituted in their room, and multitudes were contented with them, as what sufficiently answered for their neglect of all other graces and their exercise; and I wish it were not so among others, who suppose they have all the love that is required of them, if they are freed from such scandalous variances with their neighbours, as to make them unfit for the communion.

3. The variance that is pretended to be caused by setting up these *particular congregations* is a part of that variance which Christ came to send into the world, Matth. x. 34, 35, 36.—“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword: For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother; and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.” He was the Prince of Peace; he came to make peace between God and men; between men themselves, Jews and Gentiles. He taught nothing, enjoined nothing, that in its own nature should have the least inconsistency with peace, or give countenance unto variance. But he declares what would ensue and fall out, through the sin, darkness, unbelief and enmity to the truth, that would continue on some under the preaching of the gospel, whilst others of their nearest relations would embrace the truth and the profession of it. For the variance which is said to arise from the gathering these congregations, but which the way itself doth neither cause nor countenance in the least, we are not accountable. For since among those who are charged with these variances and loss of love, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope of their calling;” the same truth of the gospel preached, the same sacraments administered; and seeing both the principles of the way, and the persons of those who assemble in distinct societies for the celebration of divine worship, do tend to love and the practice of it in all its known duties,—all the evils that ensue on this way must be charged on

the enmity, hatred, pride, and secular interest of men, which it is not in our power to cure.

I may observe in this place, that it is the greatest and most powerful engine of Satan, and men of corrupt secular interests, to keep all church reformation out of the world.\*

2. Another end of the institution of this state is, that the church might be *the ground and pillar of truth*, 1 Tim. iii. 15; that is, that it might be the principal outward means to support, preserve, publish, declare, and propagate the doctrine or truth of the gospel, especially that concerning the person and offices of Christ, which the apostle subjoins in the next words to this assertion. The church state which doth not answer this end is not of a divine institution; but to this the ministry of these churches is eminently suited. Three things are required to the church being the pillar and ground of truth. 1. That it preserve the truth in itself, and in the profession of all its members, against all seducers, false teachers, and errors. This the apostle gives special charge about to the elders of the church of Ephesus, adding the reasons of it, Acts xx. 28—31. See also 1 Tim. v. 20,—2 Tim. i. 13, 24; and to this the ministry of congregational

\* Our Author, elsewhere in this work, when speaking of the gradual declension of the churches from their primitive state and order, says,—“ Nevertheless I can give no security that the churches in our way shall not in process of time, decline from their primitive constitution and order, either in their power and spirit, in faith and love, or in the outward practice of them, unless they continually watch against all beginnings and occasions of such declensions, and frequently renew their reformation. If it be otherwise, they will have better success than any churches in the world ever yet had, even those that were of the planting of the apostles themselves, as is manifest from the judgment that our Lord Jesus Christ passed on them, Rev. ii. and iii.”—And, in a Tract of his lately republished in Edinburgh, when speaking of the difficulties in the way of reformation, p. 51—54. he expresses himself to the following purpose :—“ With regard to ministers, herein the principal difficulty of the whole work does consist.—Shall we expect that such persons will be instrumental in the reforming of others, who hate to be reformed themselves? Jer. xxiii. It was so of old.

“ There are very few of this sort of persons who will be at the charge of carrying on this work. They will quickly find what it will cost them; for unless they are exemplary in it themselves, it is in vain to attempt the pressing of it upon others. They cannot go about it without great retrenchings of that which they have esteemed their liberty in the course of their conversation. All compliance with unreformed persons for secular ends, all conformity to the course of the world, in jollities and pride of life; all ostentation of riches, wealth and power, all self-seeking and self-pleasing, all lightness, and carnal confidences, must utterly be cast away; and not only so, but unless, by incessant prayers and supplications, with earnestness and perseverance, they labour for fresh anointings with the spirit of grace in their own souls, that faith and love, and zeal for God, and compassion for the souls of men, and readiness for the cross, may revive and flourish in them, they will not be useful nor instrumental in this work. And is it any wonder that the most of them think it better to suffer things to go on at the present rate, than to venture at that which will cost them so dear in its pursuit?—They find that

churches is particularly suited. The continual inspection which they may and ought to have of all the members of the church, with that circumspection and trial of the doctrines preached by themselves, in the whole body of the church, fits them for this work. This is the fundamental means that the Lord Christ hath appointed for the preservation of the truth of the gospel in this world, whereby the church is the ground and pillar of truth. By this means was the truth preserved in the churches of the two first centuries, in which they had no officers but what were placed in particular churches, so that no considerable error made any entrance amongst them.

2. That each church take care that the same truth be preserved entire, as to the profession of it in all other churches. Their communion among themselves is built upon their common HOMOLOGIA, or profession of the same faith. To preserve this entire is their duty, and accordingly it was their constant practice to attend to it, during the period specified; for a change in the faith of any of them, they knew would be the dissolution of their communion. Wherefore when any thing of that nature fell out, as it did in the church of Antioch on preaching the necessity

they shall not only disoblige and provoke all sorts of persons, and lose many of their useful friends, but also expose themselves to obloquy, contempt and reproach of all sorts. He is a lost man in this world, who, without respect of persons, will engage seriously in this work; every day he shall find one or other displeased, if not provoked.---Such was the case with Elijah, Jeremish, John the Baptist; and in after ages, Chrysostom, for the same cause, was hated by the clergy, persecuted by the court, and at length driven into banishment where he died.-----It is difficult on account of the people to be reformed; it is hard to convince them of its necessity, to persuade to attempt it, and hard to get them to persevere. One reason of this fatal negligence is, that self-justification and approbation, which all sorts of persons are inclined to, both by nature and incurable prejudices.---They will grant that same reformation is necessary; but it is to others who are worse than themselves. But whilst men have a form of godliness though they deny the power thereof, they will justify themselves from all need of reformation. Churches will do so, and all sorts of professors of religion will do so; especially if they have any particular NOTION or PRACTICE which they value themselves upon. So it was with the Jews of old, Jer. vii. 67; and so it was with the Pharisees in the days of our Saviour, John ix. 4. It is so at this day.---Hence it is that no churches would ever reform themselves, which have been the cause of all division and separation, whereby some have been saved from a general apostacy. They all approve themselves in their state and condition, which is come to that height in the papal church that they boast themselves infallible, and not capable of reformation in any thing.---Most churches think they need more revenues, more honour, more freedom from opposition, more submission of all men unto them, but they almost abhor the thoughts that they stand in need of any reformation.---But yet this consideration ought not to deter any from endeavouring the discharge of their own duty herein.---Happy will they be, be they ever so few, ever so poor, ever so unknown to the world, whom God shall find so doing, when he ariseth out of his place to shake terribly the earth."---GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD TOWARDS GUILTY NATIONS AND CHURCHES.



of circumcision and keeping of the law, by which the souls of many of the disciples were subverted; the church at Jerusalem, on the knowledge of it, helped them with their advice and counsel. And Eusebius tells us, that upon the first promulgation of the heresies and frenzies of Montanus, the *faithful*, or churches in Asia, met frequently in sundry places, to examine his pretences and condemn his errors; whereby the churches in Phrygia were preserved. *Hist. Eccl. lib. v. cap. 14.* The same was done afterwards in the case of Samosatenus at Antioch, whereby that church was delivered from the infection of his pernicious heresy, *lib. vii. cap. 26, 28, 29*; and others in like manner.— This care is still incumbent on every particular church, if it would approve itself to be a *ground and pillar of truth*. Indeed, as when the Israelites came out of Egypt there came along with them a mixed multitude, to the danger of the whole congregation; so when Christianity was first preached and received in the world, besides those who embraced it sincerely and were added to the church, there were a mixture of persons of different characters, such as stubborn Jews, plain impostors, &c. who all of them pretended to be Christians, and exceedingly perplexed the churches, by endeavouring to seduce them to their imaginations. Yet none of their abominations could force an entrance into the churches themselves, which, by the means now insisted on, were preserved. But when this church state and order was changed, and another gradually introduced in the room of it, errors and heresies got new advantages, and entered into the churches themselves, which before did only assault and perplex them. For,

When any of their bishops of the new constitution fell into heresies, which numbers of them frequently did, they had so many advantages to diffuse their poison into the whole body of their respective churches, and such political interests for their promotion, that the churches themselves were thoroughly infected with them. It is true, the body of the people in many places did oppose them, withdraw, and separate from them; but it cannot be denied that this was the first way and means whereby the churches ceased to be the pillar and ground of truth, many destructive errors being received into them, which did only outwardly assault them whilst they abode in their first institution: And had not the churches, in process of time, utterly lost their primitive state and order, by coalescing into one papal, pretended universal church, the faith itself could never have been so utterly corrupted, depraved, and lost among them as in the issue it was.

3. *To propagate the gospel* is another duty required of churches. This, I acknowledge, doth more immediately respect the duty of persons in any church order than the order itself; for it must be the work of some particular persons dedicating themselves to their ministry, as it was in the first churches, 3 John v. 6, 7, 8.



The Lord Christ hath ordained no power, order, or office in his church that stands in need of civil authority, sanction, or force to preserve it, or to make it effectual to its proper ends.—It is sufficient to disprove any thing from having any pretence to an appointment of Christ in his church, if it be not sufficient to its own proper end, without the help of the Civil Magistrate. That church state which is either constituted by human authority, or cannot subsist without it, is not from him. He will not borrow the assistance of civil authority, to rule in and over the consciences of men, with respect to their living to God, and coming to the enjoyment of himself.

The way of requiring the sanction of civil authority to ecclesiastical orders and determinations, began with the use of general councils in the time of Constantine; and when once this method was engaged in, and approved, that what was determined in the Synods, either as to doctrine or as to the rule of the church, should be confirmed by the imperial authority, with penalties on all that should gainsay such determinations, it is deplorable to consider what mutual havock was made among Christians upon the various sentiments of Synods and Emperors.

It is necessary from the institution of particular churches, that they have their subsistence, continuation, order, and the efficacy of all that they act and do, from Christ himself. The reason of it is this, all that they act and do, is heavenly, spiritual, and not of this world; it extendeth to none of those things which are under the power of the magistrate, that is, the lives and bodies of men, and all civil interests thereto belonging; affects nothing but what no power of the magistrate can extend to, that is, the souls and consciences of men. And since this is the case, no trouble can hence arise to any of the rulers of this world—no contests about what they ought and what they ought not to confirm, which has been the cause of great disorders.

It will perhaps be granted, and it cannot be modestly denied, that particular churches are of divine institution, yet there may be churches of another form and order also, as diocesan or national churches, to which we are obliged to submit.

In answer to this, I must still adduce, and somewhat more illustrate and confirm, an argument that has formerly been urged,—That there is no form, order, or church state divinely instituted, that doth, in any way, obstruct, abridge, take away, or overthrow the liberty, power and order of particular congregations, such as we have described.

These churches are meet and able to attain the ends of churches. To say they are churches, and yet have no power in themselves to attain the ends of churches, is to speak contradictions: for, as has been said, a church is nothing but a society that hath power, ability, and fitness to attain those ends for which Christ hath ordained churches. That which hath these is a church, and that which hath not these is none.

Farther, it is utterly foreign to the scripture, a monster to antiquity (I mean that which is pure, and worthy of an appeal to in this cause) that there should be churches with a part of church power and not the whole, neither in right nor exercise; or that there should be church officers, elders, presbyters, or bishops, that should have a *partial power*, a half, a third, or less, of that which entirely belongeth to the office they hold. Let one testimony be given out of the scripture, or that antiquity to which we appeal, to this purpose, and we shall give up our plea.

As to this national church that is perpetually rung in our ears, we know not what it is, nor of what persons it consists: and with respect to these diocesan or provincial churches (whose original, with the causes and occasions of their bounds, limits, power, and manner of administrations, I think God alone perfectly knows,) we do but guess at them, for there is not one word mentioned about any of their concerns in the scriptures. These churches however, cannot be said to have all the power with which Christ hath entrusted *his church*, because there is another church to which they are in subjection, and on which they depend. But it seems they have *the next degree of power* to that which is uppermost. Notwithstanding, whatever their power be, it is administered in such ways and for such ends, that I shall believe a dissent from them and it to be schism, when I believe it is midnight whilst the sun shines in his full strength.

It will perhaps be said that congregational churches were indeed originally invested with all church rights, power and authority, but for many weighty reasons are abridged in sundry things of the exercise of them; for who can think it meet that every single parish should be entrusted with the exercise of all church-rule and power among themselves.

*Ans.* Whose fault is it that these churches are not meet for the exercise of that power which Christ hath granted to his churches? If it be from themselves, their negligence, ignorance, or wickedness, it is high time they were reformed, and brought into that state and condition, in which they may be fit to answer the ends of their institution. There is no power pleaded for in congregational churches, but what is granted to them by the word and constitution of Christ;—and who is he that shall take this from them or deprive them of its exercise?—It is not done by Christ himself; he doth not pull down what himself hath built. It is true, that he by his law deprives all churches of their power yea of their state, who act and exercise a power not derived from him, but set up against him, and used to such ends as are opposite to and destructive of the ends of the church-order appointed by himself. But such churches cannot, by any act of their own, deprive themselves of this right and power; for it is committed to them in a way of trust, which they falsify, if by their own consent they part with it; and without it, they cannot discharge many duties required of them. To part with this power is to renounce their duty, which is the only way by which

they may lose it : And if it be neither taken from them by any law or constitution of Christ, nor can be renounced or given up by themselves, what other power under heaven can justly deprive them of it, or hinder them in its execution ? The truth is, the principal means which hath rendered the generality of parochial churches unfit for the exercise of any church-power is, that their right to it hath been so long unjustly detained from them, that they know not what belongs thereto, being hidden from them by those who should instruct them in it : And were they admitted, under the conduct of pious and prudent officers to the practice of any part of this duty in their assemblies, their understanding in it would quickly be encreased.

## CHAP. V.

### THE STATE OF THE FIRST CHURCHES AFTER THE APOSTLES TO THE END OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

**I**N confirmation of the foregoing argument, we urge the precedent and example of the primitive churches that succeeded those planted by the apostles themselves, and so may well be judged to have walked in the same way and order with them : And that which we affirm is this—

That in no approved writers for the space of 200 years after Christ is there any mention made of any other organical, visibly professing church, but that only which is parochial or congregational. A church of any other form, state or order, diocesan or classical, &c. they knew not, neither name nor thing; nor do any of them appear in any of their writings.

Here it may be proper to premise a few things, necessary to the right understanding of what I intend to prove by the particular testimonies that follow.

1. All the churches at first planted by the apostles, whether in the great cities, as Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Rome, &c. or those in the meanest villages of Judea, Galilee, or Samaria, were, as to their church-state, in order, power, privilege, and duty, every way equal, not superior or inferior, not ruling over or subject to one another; no *institution* of any inequality between them, no instance of any *practice* supposing it, no *direction* for any compliance with it, no one word or intimation of it can be produced from the scripture; nor is it consistent with the nature of the gospel church-state that it should be so. For,

2. In and among all these churches, there was one and the same “ spirit, one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism;” whence they were all obliged mutually to seek

and endeavour the good and edification of each other; to be helpful to one another in all things, according to that which any of them had received in the Lord. This they did by prayer, advice and counsel, and by messengers sent with salutations, exhortations, consolations, supplies for the poor, &c. By these means, and by the exercise of that mutual love and care to which they considered themselves obliged, they preserved unity and communion among themselves, gave a common testimony against any thing that in either doctrine or practice deviated from the rule and discipline of Christ. This order, accompanied with peace and love, continued among them, till pride, ambition, desire of rule and preeminence in Diotrophes, and a multitude of the same spirit with him, began to open a door to the entrance of the *mystery of iniquity*, under pretence of a better order than this which was appointed by Christ.

It must be acknowledged, that notwithstanding this equality among all churches as to their state and power, there were great differences between them, some real and some in reputation, which not being rightly managed, proved an occasion of evil in them all; for instance—some were more eminent in spiritual gifts than others. As this was a privilege that might have been greatly improved to the honour of Christ and the gospel, yet we know how it was abused in the church of Corinth, and what disorders followed thereon. So weak and frail are the best of men, so liable to temptation, that all preeminence is dangerous for them, and often abused by them; which, I confess makes me not a little wonder to see men so earnestly pleading for it, so fearlessly assuming it to themselves, so fiercely contending that all power and rule in the church belongs to them alone.

3. Reputation was given to some of the churches on account of the greatness, power, &c. of the place or city where they were planted; which, unless men strictly kept themselves to the force of primitive institutions, might make it very hard to judge that a church in a small village or town in Galilee should be equal with that in Jerusalem or at Antioch. So that it came to be a matter of great joy and triumph that there should be a church at Rome, the head city of the world; and the advancement of it in reputation, they thought, belonged to the honour of our religion, although, in the scripture, there is not the least regard expressed unto any of these things, either of place, number, or possibility of outward splendor, with respect to the promises of the presence of Christ in and with his churches, or in the communication of power and privileges to them.

Yet such an improvement did this foolish imagination find, that after those who presided in the churches of the principal cities had tasted the sweetness of the bait which lay in the ascription of preeminence to them, they began openly to *claim* it to themselves, and to usurp authority over other churches, confirming their own usurpation by canons and rules, until a few of them in the council of Nice took upon them to divide the Chris-



tian world among themselves, as if it had been conquered by them. Hence proceeded those shameful contests about superiority, carried on by all sorts of evil artifices, as by downright forgeries, shameless intrusions of themselves, impudently laying hold of all advantages to their own exaltation ; which issued in the utter ruin of all church order and worship. There is no good history of the rise and growth of any city, commonwealth, or empire, that is filled with so many instances of ambitious seeking of pre-eminence as our church histories are.

From such motives, the rulers in those days were inclined to introduce and settle a government among the churches of Christ, answering to the civil government of the Roman empire. As the civil government was cast into national, or diocesan or provincial, in less or greater divisions, each of which had its capital city, the place of the residence of the chief civil governor ; so they designed to frame an image of it in the church, by ascribing a similar dignity and power to the prelates of those cities, and a jurisdiction extending itself to nations, dioceses, and provinces. Hereby the lesser congregations, or parochial churches, being weakened, in process of time, in their gifts and interest, were swallowed up in the power of the other, and became only inconsiderable appendages to them. But it is to be observed, these things fell out long after the times which we now enquire into ; only the cause of them began to present itself to men of corrupt minds from the beginning, and which we have elsewhere related.

4. Some churches derived reputation by the long abode of some of the apostles in them ; of this we find nothing in scripture ; but certain it is, it was much pleaded and contended about ; and others had a great advantage in that the gospel, as the apostle speaks, went forth *from them* and gradually spread in other places.

But notwithstanding several variations (of a slight nature) from the original institution of churches, introduced partly from inadvertency to the rule, and partly received from the advantages pretended to, the churches continued congregational for near 200 years, the whole body of the church ordinarily meeting together in one place, for the solemn administration of the holy ordinances of worship ; and on all occasions, exercised their power in the choice or deposition of elders, the admission or exclusion of members, and other parts of discipline. This may be collected from the remaining monuments of those times : Only we must add, that we are no way concerned in testimonies or sayings taken from the writings of those in following ages, as to the state, way, and manner of the churches in this period, but do appeal to the writers themselves at the time now enquired after, or the age next to it, who knew their practice.

That which offereth itself to us, and which is an invaluable testimony of the state of the first churches, immediately after the decease of the apostles, is the epistle of Clemens Romanus unto the brethren of the church of Corinth. This epistle Ire-

ness ascribes to the whole church at Rome, and calls it *potentissimas literas*, &c. *lib. iii. cap. 3.* By Eusebius it is termed "great and admirable;" who also affirms that it was read in some churches, *Ecclesiast. Hist. lib. iii. cap. 14*; and again he calls it "a most powerful writing."

Doubtless but some things in the writings of it did befall him *humanitus*, that the work of such a companion of some of the apostles as he was, might not be received as of divine institution. But for the substance of it, it is such as every way becomes a person of an apostolical spirit, consonant to the stile and writings of the apostles themselves; a precious jewel, and just representation of the state and order of the church in those days: And sundry things we may observe upon it.

1. There is nothing in it that gives the least intimation of any other church state, but that which was *congregational*, although there were the highest reasons for him so to do, had there been any such churches then in being. The case he had in hand was that of ecclesiastical sedition or schism in the church of Corinth, the church or body of the brethren having, as it would seem, unjustly deposed their elders.

Giving advice herein to the whole church, using all sorts of arguments to convince them, directing all probable means for their cure, he never once sends them to the bishops or church of Rome, makes no mention of any single bishop and his authority, or of any diocesan (or provincial) church and its rule. No one of any such order doth he either commend or condemn, or once addresses himself unto, either in admonitions, exhortations, encouragements, or directions. He only handles the cause by the rule of the scripture, as it was stated between the church itself and its elders. Certainly there never was greater prevarication used by any man in any cause, than by Clemens in this, if the state of the church, its rule and order, were such as some now pretend. But he knew their state and order too well to insist on things that were not then in existence.

2. This epistle is written unto the *whole church* at Corinth, in the name of the *whole church* of Rome—"the church of God which dwelleth (or sojourneth as a stranger) at Rome, to the church of God which dwelleth (or sojourneth) at Corinth:"—for although that church was then under no certain rule, having cast off all their elders, yet the church of Rome not only allows it to be a sister church, but salutes the brethren of it in the following words—"called and sanctified, through the will of God, by our Lord Jesus Christ." The churches of Christ were not so ready in those days to condemn the persons, nor to judge the church state and condition of others, on every miscarriage, real or supposed, as some have been and are in these latter ages.

3. This address being from the body of the church at Rome unto that at Corinth, without the least mention of their officers, it is evident the churches themselves, that is, the whole entire community of them, had communion with one another, as they

were sister churches ; and that they had themselves the transaction of all affairs in which they were concerned, as they had in the days of the apostles, Acts xv. 1, 2, 3. It was the *brethren* of the church at Antioch who determined that " Paul and Barnabas, and certain others, should go up to Jerusalem " to consult the apostles and elders. See also chap. xxi. xxii. This they did not, nor ought to do, without the presence, guidance, and consent of their elders or rulers, where they had any ; but this they were not excluded from. And that church, the whole body or brotherhood of which doth advise and consult in those things in which they are concerned, on the account of their communion with other churches, is a *congregational* church, and no other. It was the church who sent this epistle to the Corinthians ; Claudius Ephebus, Valerius, Bibo, Fortunatus, are named as their messengers, " that are sent by us," our messengers, our apostles in these matters, such as the churches made use of on all such occasions in the apostles days, 2 Corinthians viii. 23 ; and the persons whom they sent were only members of the church, and not officers ; nor do we any where hear of them under that character. Now they could not be sent in the name of the church, but by its consent ; nor could the church consent without its assembling together.

This was the state and order of the first churches. In that communion which was amongst them, according to the mind of Christ, they had a singular concern in the welfare and prosperity of each other, and were solicitous about them in their trials. Hence those who were planted at a greater distance than would allow frequent personal converse, did, on all occasions, send messengers to one another ; sometimes merely to visit them in love, and sometimes to give or take advice. But these things, and indeed almost all others that belong to the communion of churches, either in themselves or with one another, are either utterly lost and buried, or kept above ground in a pretence of the authority of rulers ; churches themselves being wholly excluded from any concern in them.

4. The description given of the church of Corinth before they fell into the disorder for which they are reprov'd, is such as bespeaks their walking together in one and the same society ; and is sufficient to make any good man desire that he might see churches again in the world, to whom, or to the generality of whose members that description might be honestly and justly applied. I shall only mention one character that is given them—" there was a full (or plentiful) effusion of the Holy Ghost upon you all ; so that being filled with an holy will, and a good readiness of mind, with a pious, devout confidence, you fervently prayed to Almighty God, supplicating mercy for the pardon of your involuntary sins, labouring night and day in your prayers for the whole brotherhood, that the number of God's elect might be saved in mercy, through a good conscience towards him."



He that would ascribe these things to any churches which now put in an exclusive claim to the name of churches, would quickly find himself at a loss for the proof of what he asserts. Did we all carefully endeavour to reduce and restore churches to their primitive state and frame, it would bring more glory to God than all our contentions about rule and dominion.

5. It is certain that the church at Corinth was fallen into a sinful excess, at the suggestion of two or three discontented persons, in the rejection of their elders whom the church at Rome judged to have presided among them laudably and unblamably. But in the whole epistle, the church is no where reproved for assuming an authority to themselves which did not belong to them, but for exercising it on ill grounds. He therefore exhorts the *body of the church* to return to their duty in the restoration of their elders; and then prescribes to them who were the first occasion of schism, that every one would subject themselves to the restored presbyter, and say, "I will do the things appointed or commanded by the multitude," that is, the church in the generality of its members. The *plebs*, the multitude, the body of the brotherhood in the church, *TO PLETHOS*, as they were often called in the scripture, (Acts iv. 32. chap. vi. 2, 5. chap. xv. 12, 30.) with their officers, had then right and power to appoint things that were to be done in the church for order and peace; whence the acts concluded on may be esteemed and are the acts of the whole church. This order can be observed only in a *congregational church*.

But for the sake of them who may endeavour to reduce any church state to its primitive constitution, as a caution against the evil here reflected upon, I cannot but transcribe an advice that he gives, which is worthy of the remembrance of all church members. After having declared the scandal that ensued, both among believers and infidels, from the schism respecting their elders, he adds, "Let a man be faithful,—let him be powerful  
" in knowledge, or the declaration of it,—let him be wise to  
" judge the word or doctrines,—let him be chaste or pure in  
" his works; the greater he seems to be, the more humble he  
" ought to be, that so the church may have no trouble by him  
" nor his gifts."

6. Having occasion to mention the officers of the church, he nameth only the two ranks, *Bishops* and *Deacons*, as the apostle also doth, Phil. i. 1.—speaking of the apostles, he says, "preaching the word through regions and cities, they appointed the  
" first fruits," (as the house of Stephanus was the first fruits of Achaia, who therefore addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, 1 Cor. xvi. 15.) "or the first converts to the faith,  
" after a spiritual trial of them, to be bishops and deacons of  
" them that should afterwards believe, with choice and consent  
" of the whole church." Other distinction and difference of ordinary officers, besides that of bishops (or elders) and deacons,



the church of Rome in those days knew not. Such ought to be in every particular church.

I have insisted long on this testimony, being led on by the excellency of the writing itself. Nothing remains written so near the times of the apostles, nor does any thing extant which was written afterwards, give such an evidence of apostolical wisdom, gravity, and humility. Neither is there in all antiquity, after the writings of the apostles, such a representation of the state, order, and rule of the first evangelical churches; and it is much against the pretensions of future ages, that this apostolical person, handling a most weighty ecclesiastical cause, makes not the least mention of such offices, power, and proceedings, as some would have all church rule and order to consist in.

The epistle of Polycarpus, and the elders of the church at Smyrna with him, to the church of the Philippians, is the next on the roll of antiquity. Nothing appears in the whole to intimate any other church state or order than that described by Clemens. This epistle is directed to the whole church at Philippi: "Polycarpus and the elders with him, to the church of God dwelling at Philippi." This was the usual stile of those days; so it was used, as we have seen, by Clemens; so it was used presently after the death of Polycarpus by the church at Smyrna, in the account they gave of his martyrdom:—"The church of God dwelling at Smyrna, to the church dwelling at Philomelios." And it may be observed, that in all these primitive writings there is still a distinction made, after the manner of the scripture, between the *church* and the *rulers* or *guides* of it; and the name of the church is constantly assigned to the body of the people as distinct from the officers, who are no where so called as distinct from the people; though the church in its complete state comprehendeth both.

Justin Martyr wrote his second apology for the Christians to the Roman emperors, about the year 150. It is marvellous to consider how ignorant not only the common sort of Pagans but the *philosophers* also, and governors of the nations, were of the nature of Christian churches, and of the worship celebrated in them. But who are so blind as those who will not see? Even to this day, not a few are willingly or rather wilfully ignorant of the nature of such assemblies, or what is performed in them, or among the primitive Christians, that they may be at liberty to speak all manner of evil of them falsely. Hence were all the reports and stories among the heathen, concerning what was done in the Christian conventicles, which they represented to be the most abominable villanies that were ever acted by mankind.

In this state of things, our great and learned philosopher, who afterwards suffered martyrdom about the year 160, undertook to give an account to Antonius Pius and Lucius, who then ruled the Roman empire, of the nature, order, and worship of the

Christian churches ; and that in such an excellent manner, that I know of nothing material that can be added to it, were an account of the same thing to be given to like persons at this day. We may remark a few things on some heads of it.

1. He declares the conversion of men to the faith as the foundation of all their church-order and worship. " As many as " are persuaded and do believe the things to be true which are " taught and spoken by us, and take upon themselves that are " able to live according to that doctrine, they are taught to seek " of God, by fasting and prayer, the pardon of their foregoing " sins ; and we also do join together with them in the same for " that end." And herein the only means of conversion that he insists on is the *preaching of the word*, in which they in particular continued on the doctrine of the person and offices of Christ, as appears through his whole apology. This declaration of the truth of the gospel, to the conversion of the hearers, he doth not confine to any especial sort of persons, as he doth afterwards the administration of the holy things in the church, but speaks of it in general as the work of all Christians who were able for it, as the apostle does, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25, 31. Those who were converted did two things : They *professed their faith* or assent to the truth of the doctrine of the gospel, and took on themselves to live according to the rule of it, to do and observe the things commanded by Jesus Christ, as he appointed they should, Matth. xxviii. 18, 19. To lay a sure and comfortable foundation of their future profession, they were taught to confess their future sins, and by earnest prayer, with fastings, to seek of God the pardon and forgiveness of them ; and herein (such was their love and zeal) those who had been the means of their conversion joined with them for their comfort and edification. It is well known how this whole process is lost, and on what account it is discontinued : But whether it be done to the advantage of the Christian religion, and the good of the souls of men, is well worth a strict enquiry.

2. He declares how those who were so converted, were conducted to baptism, and how thereby they were initiated into the mysteries of the gospel.

3. When any was baptized, they brought him to the church to which he was to be joined. " Him who is thus baptized, " and is received (by consent) among us, we bring him unto " those called the brethren, when they are met for joint prayers and supplications," &c. We have here another illustrious instance of the care and diligence of the primitive church about the receiving of professed believers into the communion of the church. That those who were to be admitted made their *public confession*, we shall afterwards declare. And the brethren here mentioned are the whole brotherhood of the church who were concerned in these things ; and Justin is not ashamed to declare by what name they called one another among themselves,

even to the heathen, though it be now a scorn and reproach among them that are called Christians.

4. He proceeds to declare the nature of their church meetings or assemblies, with the duties and worship of them; and he tells us, that they had frequent meetings among themselves; they that have any wealth do help the poor, and “we are continually together;” that is, in the lesser occasional assemblies of the brethren; for so, in the next place, he adds immediately, “on the day called Sunday, there is a meeting of all that dwell in the towns and villages about.” Hence it is evident, that Justin knew no other state of the church but that of a particular congregation, whose members all met together in one place.

5. In this church he mentions only two sorts of officers, *Presidents and Deacons*. Of the first sort, in the duty of one of their assemblies he mentions but one, the president.

6. The things that he ascribeth to this *leader*, to be done at this general meeting of the church every Lord’s day, were, 1. That he prayed—2. That after the reading of the scriptures, he preached—3. That he consecrated the Eucharist, or Lord’s Supper, by praying and giving thanks at large; the elements of the bread and wine being distributed by the deacons to the congregation—4. That he closed the whole worship of the day in prayer, or, as Justin expresses it, according to his ability or power, sends up prayers, the people all joyfully crying *Amen*.

After the participation of the Lord’s Supper, there was a collection made for the poor; to which was added, as Tertullian observes, the exercise of discipline in their assemblies, whereof we shall speak afterwards.

This was the state, the order, and the worship of the church, with its method, in the days of Justin Martyr. This and no other is that which we plead for.

To these times belongs the most excellent epistle of the churches of Vienna and Lyons in France, unto the brethren in Asia and Phrygia, recorded at large by Eusebius, *Hist. lib. v. cap. 1*. Their design in it is, to give an account of the holy martyrs who suffered in the persecution under Marcus Antoninus. The epistle was written by the brethren of those churches, and it was directed to the brethren of the churches in Asia and Phrygia, after the manner of the scriptures, in which the body of the church was designed or intended in all such epistles: And as this manifests the concern of the brotherhood in all ecclesiastical affairs, so, with all other circumstances, it proves that those churches were particular or congregational only. This epistle, as recorded by Eusebius, gives us also a noble representation of the spirit and communion that was then among the churches of Christ, being written with apostolical simplicity and gravity, and remote from those titles of honour and affected swelling words with which the spurious writings of that age, and some that are genuine in those that followed, are stuffed.

Tertullian, who lived at the end of the second century, gives us the same account of the state, order, and worship of the churches as was given before by Justin Martyr. It was usual with the ancients to express universal obedience to the doctrines and commands of Christ under the name of *discipline*. Accordingly Tertullian gives a description of a church in these words: "We are a body united in the conscience of religion (or a conscientious observance of the duties of religion), by an agreement in discipline, and in a covenant of hope." They covenanted together, so to live and walk in the discipline of Christ, or obedience to his commands, as that they might come together to the enjoyment of eternal blessedness.

This religious body or society, thus united, did meet together in the same assembly or congregation. *Corpus sumus, coimus in eadem et congregationem*, &c. In these assemblies their elders presided, who, upon a testimony of their meetness, were chosen thereunto; and in the church thus met together in the same place, among other things, they exercised discipline, in the presence and by the consent of the whole. The loss of this discipline, and the manner of its administration, hath been one of the principal means of the apostacy of churches from their primitive institution.

From these testimonies insisted on, we may observe—

1. That there is in them a true and full representation of the state, order, rule, and discipline of the first churches in the first ages. It is a sufficient demonstration that all those things wherein the state and order of the church are at present supposed to consist are indeed later inventions, because they are not mentioned by the above writers, when they avowedly profess to give an account of that state and order of the church which was then in use. Had such officers, such plans of churches, inclosure of church power, and things of the like nature, been then invented and in use, how could they possibly be excused in passing them over, without so much as doing them *the honour* of being once mentioned by them? How easy would it have been for their Pagan rulers, unto whom some of them presented an account of their churches, to have replied, that they knew well enough there were other dignities, orders, and practices than what they acknowledged, which they were either afraid or ashamed to own?—But besides this silence, they, on the contrary, assert such things of the officers in the church, of the way of their appointment, of their duty, of the power and liberty of the people, of the nature and exercise of discipline, as are utterly inconsistent with that state of these things which is by some pleaded for. Yea, as we have shewed, whatever they write or speak about churches or their order, can have no being or exercise in any other form of churches but of particular congregations.

2. That representation which they make of the state and order of the churches among them doth absolutely agree with



what we are taught in the divine writings about the same things. There were, indeed, before the end of the second century, some practices about lesser matters that they had no warrant for from any thing written or done by the apostles, but for substance they were the same with the apostolic age.

From this state, however, the churches did, by degrees, insensibly degenerate, so that another form of churches appeared about the end of the third century. This was owing, in a great measure, as has been elsewhere observed, to their deviation from the apostolical practice, of ordaining elders in *every church*; and not only in cities and towns, but, as Clemens affirms, in *country villages*. The example and direction of the apostles in this case were followed until the time of Origen, for so he writeth—"And, knowing that there is another heavenly city, "in any town, built by the word of God," (or that there are other congregations gathered in the towns up and down by the preaching of the word) "we persuade some that are found in "doctrine, of good conversation, and meet for their rule, to "take on them the conduct or rule of those churches; and "these, whilst they rule within the churches those societies of "divine institution by which they are chosen, they govern "them according to the prescriptions or commands and rules "given by God himself," *Advers. Gels. lib. 8*. Those of whom he speaks, were the pastors or principal members of the churches that were established. When they understood that in any place distant from them, a number of believers were gathered into church order by the preaching of the word, they presently, according to their duty, took care of them, enquired into their state and condition, assisting them in particular, in finding out, trying, and recommending to them persons meet to be their officers. These believers he acknowledgeth to be *churches and cities of God*, upon their collection by the preaching of the word, before the constitution of any officers among them; as the apostles did, Acts xiv. 22, 23. Wherefore the church is essentially (or as to its being) before its ordinary officers, and cannot, as to its continuance, depend on any succession of them, seeing these officers have no succession but what the church gives to them, as will afterwards be fully proved.

These officers, thus recommended, were chosen, as he tells us, by the churches wherein they were to preside, and thereon did govern them by the rule of God's word alone. By this was the original constitution and state of the first churches for a good season preserved; nor was there the least abridgment of the power either of these churches or of their officers, for, as has been proved, every true church hath all the rights and powers that belong to churches; and every true officer, bishop, elder or pastor, hath all the power that Christ hath annexed to that office.

This course, however, in many places, not long after came to be omitted, and many of the poorer congregations turned depen-

dent on the city churches, and were governed by their bishops. This alteration was confirmed by the *synods* that afterwards ensued.

We shall conclude the evidence of the true state and nature of evangelical churches being only particular congregations, by referring the reader to consider what representation of this is made in the under-mentioned places compared together.\*

It has already been observed, that congregational churches alone are suited to the ends of Christ in the institution of his church; the duties and powers ascribed in the scripture unto churches being many of them such as could not be performed by the body of the people in any church but that which is congregational only. This argument alone is sufficient to bear the weight of this whole cause. It was also observed before, that the epistles of the apostles were written all of them (except those that were written to private persons by name) unto the body of the churches or entire brotherhood † of them. This is plain in all the epistles of Paul, wherein sometimes distinct mention is made of the officers in the church, sometimes none at all; so the apostle John affirms that he wrote unto the church, but that Diotrephes (who seems to have been their bishop) *received him not*; at once rejecting the authority of the apostle, and overthrowing the liberty of the church. And the apostle Peter writing unto the *churches*, on an especial occasion, speaks distinctly of the elders, the body of the epistle being written to the churches, 1 Peter v. 1, 2—see also Heb. xiii. 24. Wherefore all the institutions, directions and injunctions given in those epistles respecting the exercise of power or performance of duty are given unto the CHURCHES THEMSELVES.

\* The places of scripture that may be compared together are,---Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17, 18.---Acts i. 12, 23; chap. ii. 1, 42, 44, 46; chap. v. 11, 12, 13; chap. xi. 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30; chap. xii. 5, 12; chap. xiv. 26, 27; chap. xv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 13, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30; chap. xx. 28.---Rom. xv. 5, 6, 14, 25, 26; chap. xvi. 1, 17, 18.---1 Cor. i. 4, 5; chap. v. throughout; chap. xii. 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 28, 29, 30, 31; chap. xiv. throughout; chap. xvi. 10, 11.---2 Cor. iii. 1, 2, 3; chap. viii. 22, 23; chap. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11; chap. viii. 5.---Ephes. ii. 19, 20, 21, 22; chap. v. 11.---Gal. vi. 1.---Phil. ii. 25, 26, 27, 28.---Colos. i. 1, 2; chap. ii. 1, 2; chap. iii. 16; chap. iv. 9.---1 Thes. v. 11, 12, 13, 14.---2 Thes. iii. 6, 7, 14, 15.---Heb. xii. 13; chap. x. 24, 25.---In these, I say, and other places innumerable, there are those things affirmed of and ascribed unto the apostolic churches, with respect to their state, order, assemblies, duties, powers, and privileges, as proves them congregational and nothing else.

† An observation of a noted defender of classical presbytery against the congregational plan, merits a place here by way of contrast to the above. He says "That brother or brethren is usually applied as the characteristic of church officers, as distinguished from the saints, or private believers, of any church." He also adds---"And indeed our Lord appropriates this name to his apostles, and thereby expresses that equality of authority and power that was among them, or that one of them was not raised above another in office," Matth. xxiii. 8.

## CHAP. VI.

## THE CONTINUANCE OF A CHURCH STATE AND OF CHURCHES TO THE END OF THE WORLD---THE CAUSES OF IT, AND ON WHAT IT DEPENDS.

THERE was a church-state under the Old Testament solemnly erected by God himself; and although it was not to be absolutely perpetual, but only to continue until the *time of reformation*; yet the promise of God to Abraham, that he would preserve his seed in covenant with him, till he should be the heir of the world, and the father of many nations in the coming of Christ, secured its continuance. The means whereof were,—*First, Carnal generation.* The priests were to be all of the family of Aaron, and the people of the seed of Abraham by the other heads of tribes, which gave them their right to this church state. *2dly, Circumcision*, the want of which was a hindrance to any advantage by the other privilege. *3dly, The separation of the people* from the rest of the world, by innumerable divine ordinances.

In this manner was the church state under the Old Testament preserved to its appointed season; and were it so, that there are not causes and means for the infallible continuance of the gospel church state to the consummation of all things, then the work of Moses was more honourable, more powerful and effectual, in the constitution of the church state under the *old dispensation*, than that of Christ under the *new*. But nothing can be more derogatory to the glory of the wisdom and power of Christ, nor to his truth and faithfulness, than such an imagination. We shall therefore enquire into the causes and means of the *continuance* of this church state, shew the certainty of it, and also disprove that which by some is pretended as the only means thereof.

The nature of the church instituted by the authority of Jesus Christ, was always the same. But with respect to its *outward form* and order, it was necessary that it should have a double state. So that the church may be considered, 1. In its relation to those extraordinary officers, whose office and power was antecedent unto the church, as that by virtue whereof it was to be erected. 2. With respect to ordinary officers, unto whose office and power the church essentially considered, (or as to its being) was antecedent; for their whole work and duty as such is conversant about the church.

The first state is ceased, nor can it be continued. For these officers were constituted by an immediate call from Christ, extraordinary gifts, divine inspiration, and infallible guidance both in preaching the word and appointing things necessary in churches; and by an *extensive commission* giving them power towards all



the world for its conversion, and over all churches for their edification. The state and condition of the church, with respect unto them, I say, is utterly ceased, and nothing can be more vain, than to pretend any succession unto them in the whole or any part of their office.

But it doth not hence follow, that the church state instituted by Christ did fail thereon, or could fail, though it is impossible that these apostles should have any successors in their office or the discharge of it; for, by the authority of the Lord Christ, the church is to be continued under ordinary officers, without the call, gifts, or power of the other, which are ceased. Under these, the church state is no less divine than under the former; for there are these two things in it—*first*, The offices themselves are of the appointment of Christ, Eph. iv. 11, 12; 1 Cor. xii. 18; if not, we confess the divine right of the church state would have ceased—*2dly*, That persons were to be invested in these offices according to the ways and means by him prescribed; not by his own immediate, extraordinary actings, as with the former sort, but such as consisted in the churches acting according to his law, and in obedience to his commands.

When there was a church planted at Jerusalem, there were not only apostles in it, according to its first state, but *elders* also, which respected its second state that was approaching, Acts xv. 23—the apostles being in office *before* that church state, the elders ordained *in it*, chap. xi. 30—“and the apostles ordained elders in every church,” Acts xiv. 22—Tit. xv.—1 Tim. v. 17. whom they affirmed to be made so by the Holy Ghost, Acts xx. 28. The churches to whom the apostle Paul wrote his epistles were all of them under the rule of ordinary officers, Phil. i. 1; rules and laws are given for their ordination in all ages, Tit. i. 1 Tim. iii.; and the Lord Christ treated from heaven with his churches in this state and order.

The causes by which the continuation of the gospel church state is secured are of various kinds—the principal of them are the following:

1. The supreme cause of it is, the Father's grant of a *perpetual kingdom* in this world unto Jesus Christ, the mediator and head of the church, Ps. lxxii. 5, 7, 15—17; Isa. ix. 7; Zech. vi. 13. This everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ, given to him by the Father, may be considered three ways: 1. With respect to the real subjects of it, true believers, who are the object of the internal, spiritual power and rule of Christ. Of these it is necessary, from the divine constitution of the kingdom of Christ, that in all ages he should have some, yea a multitude, who are his true, real spiritual subjects. This therefore is a fundamental article of our faith. So that neither the power of Satan, nor the rage or fury of the world, nor the apostacy of many or of all visible churches, from the purity and holiness of



his laws, can hinder that the church of Christ, in this sense, shall have a perpetual continuation in the world, Matt. xvi. 18.

*Secondly*, This kingdom may be considered with respect to the outward visible profession of subjection and obedience unto him, and the observance of his laws. He was to have a kingdom *in* this world, though it be not *of* this world. The world of men in it were to see and know, that he hath still a kingdom, and a multitude of subjects depending on his rule.

Here we may observe, that those who would confine the church of Christ, in this notion of it, to any one church having a particular denomination, and which may utterly fail; or are ready, on the other hand, upon the supposed or real errors of some or any of them who make this profession, to cast these persons out of their thoughts and affections, as not belonging to the kingdom or the church of Christ, are not only injurious unto them, but enemies to the glory and honour of Christ.

*Thirdly*, This grant of the father may be considered with respect to particular churches or congregations. In these churches, as has already been declared, believers were designed to act all those graces of the Spirit of Christ, wherein, both as to faculty and exercise, their internal subjection unto Christ doth consist. And as this is that whereby the glory of Christ in this world doth most eminently consist, namely, in the joint exercise of the faith and love of true believers,—so it is a principal means of the increase of those graces in themselves, or their spiritual edification. And from this special end of these churches it follows, that those who are members of them, or belong to them, ought to be *saints by calling*, or such as are endowed with those spiritual principles and graces, in whose exercise Christ is to be glorified: And where they are not so, the principal end of their constitution is lost. Another end of these churches is, that those who belong to the kingdom of Christ, under the second consideration, as visibly professing subjection to the rule of Christ and faith in him, may express that subjection, in the acts and duties of his worship, and observance of his laws. This we have proved can only be done in particular churches. Hence it follows, that it belongs to the foundation of these particular churches, that those who join in them do it on a PUBLIC PROFESSION of faith in Christ, and obedience unto him, without which this end of them also is lost.

Wherefore this state of the church, without which both the other are imperfect, belongs unto the grant of the Father, whereby a perpetual continuation of it is secured: And they do but deceive themselves and trouble others, who think of suspending this continuation on mean and low conditions of their own framing.

2. The continuation of the gospel church state depends on the *promise of Christ himself to preserve and continue it*. He hath assured us that he will so build his church on the rock

that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, Matth. xvi. 18.

3. It depends on the *word or law of Christ*, which gives right and title to all believers to congregate themselves in a church state, with rules and commands for their so doing. Suppose that there are a number of believers, the disciples of Christ, in a certain place, where they can assemble and unite themselves, or join together in a society for the worship of God; and at the same time they are in no church state, nor do know nor own any power of men that can put them into that state—I say, the institution of this church state by the authority of Christ, his commands unto his disciples to observe therein whatever he hath commanded, and the rules he hath given whereby such a church state is to be erected, what officers are to preside therein, and what other duties belong thereunto, is sufficient warrant for them to join themselves in such a state. Who shall make it unlawful for the disciples of Christ to obey the commands of their Lord and Master? Who shall make it lawful for them to neglect what he requires at any time? Wherever, therefore, men have the word of the scripture to teach them their duty, it is lawful for them to comply with all the commands of Christ contained therein. And since there are many privileges accompanying this church state, and those who are interested therein are as such the special object of many divine promises, this word and law of Christ doth make a *conveyance* of them all unto those who, in obedience unto his institutions and commands, do enter into that state, by the way and means that he hath appointed. Wherefore, this state cannot cease, but on a supposition that there are none in the world who are willing to obey the commands of Christ; which utterly overthrows the very being of the church catholic.

4. It depends on the *communication of spiritual gifts for the work of the ministry*, as is expressly declared, Ephes. iv. The continuation of the church, as to the being of it, depends on the communication of saving grace; and if the Lord Jesus Christ should withhold the communication of spiritual gifts and abilities, this church state must cease. An image of it may be erected, but the true church state will fail; for that will hold no longer “but whilst the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted “by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual “working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the “body unto the edifying of itself in love,” holds the head, Ephes. iv. 16; Col. ii. 19. Such dead lifeless images are many churches in the world. But this communication of spiritual gifts for the use of his disciples, he hath promised to the end of the world.

*Lastly*, As a means of it, it depends on three things in believers themselves: *First*, A due sense of their duty, to be found in obedience to all the commands of Christ. *Secondly*, The influence of the new creature, causing those in whom it is to asso-

ciate themselves in holy communion, for the joint and mutual exercise of those graces of the Spirit, which are the same, as to their nature, in them all. The laws of Christ to his church, as to all outward obedience, are suited to those inward principles and inclinations, which, by his Spirit and grace, are implanted in the hearts of them that believe. Hence his yoke is easy and his commandments not grievous; and therefore, none of his true disciples, since he had a church upon the earth, could satisfy themselves in their own faith and obedience singularly and personally, but would venture their lives, and all that was dear unto them, for communion with others, and the associating themselves with those of the same spirit and way, for the observance of the commands of Christ. The martyrs of the primitive church, lost more of their blood for their meetings and assemblies, than for personal profession of the faith; and so also have others done under the Roman apostacy. Nor indeed hath the Lord Christ left his people at liberty to make a composition for their outward peace, or to purchase quietness by foregoing any part of their duty. *Thirdly*, It is extremely evident that various duties required of us in the gospel, can never be performed in a due manner, but where believers are brought into this church state.

On these sure grounds is founded the continuation of the gospel church state, under ordinary officers, after the decease of the apostles.

But there are some who maintain, that the continuation and preservation of this church state depends solely on a successive ordination of church officers, from the apostles, through all ages to the end of the world. There is, say they, a *flux of power* through the hands of the ordainers unto the ordained, by virtue of their own ordination, on which the being of the church doth depend. However, those who use this plea are not agreed about those things which are essential to this successive ordination. Some think that the Lord Christ committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven unto Peter only, and he to the bishop of Rome alone; from whose person, therefore, all their ordination must be derived: Some think, (and those on various grounds) that it is committed unto all diocesan bishops, and them only, whose being and beginning are very uncertain. Others require no more to this succession but that presbyters be ordained by presbyters.

But since this whole argument about personal successive ordination hath been fully handled, and the pretences to it disproved, by the chief Protestant writers against the Papists,—and because my design is the confirmation of the truth, rather than to oppose the opinions of others, I shall very briefly discover the fallacy of this pretence.

1. The church is *before* all its ordinary officers, and therefore its continuation cannot depend on their successive ordination. The Lord Christ did ordain apostles and evangelists when there was yet no gospel church, for they were to be the instru-



ments of its calling and erection; but the apostles neither did nor could ordain any ordinary officers, until there was a church or churches to which they should be ordained. It is therefore highly absurd to ascribe the continuation of the church to the successive ordination of officers, seeing that depends solely on the continuation of the church. A successive ordination in some sense may be granted, namely, that when those die who were ordained officers in any church, others may be ordained in their stead; but this is an act of the *church itself*.

2. This successive ordination is founded on such presumptions and false principles, that it would leave us in doubt whether there be any church state in the world. For instance, those who think there is a flux of power from one bishop to another by ordination, must prove that such bishops were ordained by the apostles, which can never be done—That they, by an authority inherent in themselves, had power to ordain others, and thus communicate their whole power, which can as little be proved as the other—That they never could forfeit this power by any crime or error—That it is all one whether persons so ordained have any call from the church or not, whether they have any of the qualifications required by the law of Christ in the scripture, to make them capable of any office in the church, or have received any spiritual gifts from Christ, for the exercise of their office; for being thus ordained they ordain others, and so the successive ordination is continued. And what is this, but to take the rule of the church out of the hand of Christ, to give law unto him, to add the sanction of his approbation to the actings of men, while aside from and contrary to his law and institution, and to make application of his promises to the vilest of men, whether he will or not!

3. The pernicious *consequences* that may ensue on this principle of successive ordination, do manifest its inconsistency with what our Lord Jesus Christ hath ordained as a security for the continuation of his church. If we consider whither it hath already led a great part of the church, we may easily judge of its nature and tendency. It hath, I say, led men into a presumption of a good church state, in the loss of holiness and truth, in the practice of false worship and idolatry, in the persecution and slaughter of the faithful servants of Christ. To think there should be a flux and communication of heavenly and spiritual power from Jesus Christ and his apostles, from the hands of persons who were instrumental in all this, is an imagination embraced by men who embrace the shadows of things, without considering the true nature of them.

4. The principal argument by which this conceit is fully discarded, arises from the due consideration of the proper subject of all church power, and to whom it is originally and formally given by Jesus Christ; for none can communicate this power to others, but those who have received it themselves from him—Now, this is the WHOLE CHURCH, and not any person in it nor



prelate over it. Whatever constitutes it a church, the same gives it all the power and privilege of a church ; for a church is nothing but a “ SOCIETY OF PROFESSED BELIEVERS, enjoying “ all church power and privileges, by virtue of the law of “ Christ.” To this church, which is his spouse, hath the Lord Christ committed the keys of his house, by whom they are delivered into the hands of his stewards, so far as their office requires that trust.

Nothing that hath been said doth at all hinder that where churches are rightly constituted, they ought to be preserved in their offices, officers, and order, by a successive ordination of office-bearers ; and those who actually preside in churches have a particular interest in the orderly communication of church power to them.

The office of the ministry for the continuation of the church state, and administration of all ordinances of worship, to the end of the world, is sufficiently secured by the constitution and appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ erecting that office, and giving warrant for its continuance till the consummation of all things, Matth. xxviii. 20. Eph. iv. 13 ; and by continuing, according to his promise, to communicate spiritual gifts unto men for the edification of the church. His continuing to bestow these gifts is the principal evidence of his abiding in the discharge of his Mediatorial office. It is also secured by its being made the duty of believers, or of the church, to chuse, call, and solemnly set apart to the office of the ministry, such as the Lord Christ hath made meet for it, according to the rule of his word.

If those or any of them fail, I acknowledge that all ministerial authority and ability for the dispensation of gospel ordinances must fail also, and consequently the state of the church. And those who plead for the continuation of a successive ministry, without respect to these things, without making both the authority and office of it to consist in these alone, do only erect a dead image, or embrace a dead carcase, instead of the living and life-giving institution of Christ. They take away the living creature, and set up a *skin stuffed with straw*. But if these things do unalterably continue ; if the law of Christ can neither be changed, or if his dispensation of spiritual gifts, according to his promise, cannot be impeded ; and if believers through his grace will continue in obedience to his commands, it is not possible that there can be an entire failure in the office and office-power of this ministry. It may fail in this or that place, in this or that church, when the Lord Christ doth remove his candlestick ; but it hath a living root whence it will spring again in other places and churches, till the end of the world.

## CHAP. VII.

## THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE CHURCH.

**I**N the whole of the preceding discourse, it has been considered as the duty of all individual Christians to give themselves up to the conduct, friendship, and communion of some particular church or congregation. Now, seeing there are great differences among professing societies in the world, concerning each of which it is said, "Lo, here is Christ, and, lo, there is Christ," our present enquiry is, What sort of church is it, what its constitution and order, to which any person ought to join himself, who is duly concerned about his own edification and salvation? But it will be necessary to premise a few things that belong to the just statement of the enquiry.

The differences among churches that ought to be kept in view in the choice of any to which we would join ourselves, are of two sorts: 1. Such as are occasioned by the remaining weakness, infirmities, and ignorance of the best of men, whereby they know but in part and prophesy but in part, and in which our edification is concerned, but our salvation not endangered;—2. Such as respect things fundamental in faith, worship, and obedience.

All Christians were originally of one mind in all things relative to joint communion, so as there might be among them all, love without dissimulation. Nevertheless, there was a great variety, not only in the measure of their apprehensions of the doctrines of truth, but in some doctrines themselves, (as the continuance of the observation of the law) as well as oppositions from without to the truth, by hereticks and apostates, none of which, however, hindered the communion of true believers. But the differences and divisions that are now among churches, are the effect of the great apostacy, which beset them all in the latter ages; from the rule and practice of those churches which were planted by the apostles, and will not be healed until that apostacy be abolished.

Satan, having taken advantage of these divisions of which he was the author, makes use of them to act his malice and rage, in stirring up and inflaming one party to persecute and devour another, until the life, power, and glory of the Christian religion is almost lost in the world. It requires, therefore, great wisdom to conduct ourselves aright among these divisions, so as to contribute nothing to the malicious ends of Satan.

In this state of things, which will never be cured by any of the ways yet proposed, the enquiry is, What is the duty of a person who is concerned about his own soul?

If it be said, that were all allowed to judge what is best for their own edification, and to act according to the judgment which they form, they will be continually going from one church to another, until all churches are filled with disturbance and confusion—

I would answer, that the contrary assertion, namely, that men are not allowed to judge what is best for their own edification, or not to act according to their judgment herein, may possibly keep up some churches, but it is the ready way to destroy all religion. Many of those by whom this liberty is denied to others, do indeed take it for granted that themselves have such a liberty, and that it is their duty to make use of it. All Christians actually do so unless they are hardened in sin; and therefore those who do not so in all things of spiritual and eternal concern, are not to be esteemed disciples of Christ. Even those who shut their eyes against the light, and follow the multitude, resolving not to enquire into any of these things, do it, because they judge it best for them so to do.

It is commonly acknowledged by Protestants, that private Christians have a judgment of discretion in things of religion. The term was invented to grant them some liberty of judgment, in opposition to the blind obedience required by the church of Rome, but on purpose to put a restraint upon it, and a distinction of some superior judgment in the church, or some persons in it.-- But if by *discretion*, they mean the best of man's understanding, knowledge, wisdom, and prudence, I would be glad to be informed what *other* judgment than that of *discretion* about the things of religion, any church in the world can exercise.

Our enquiry will be best conducted by treating of the true nature and government of a gospel church under the following heads. The first that occurs is the *matter* of it.

The church may be considered either as to its constitution and being, or as to its power and order, when it is organized. With respect to its essence or being, its constituent parts are its *matter* and *form*.

By the *matter* of the church, we understand the persons of which the church doth consist, with their qualifications; and, by its *form*, the reason, cause, and way of that relation, which gives them the being of a church, and thereupon an interest in all that belongs unto a church, either of privilege or power.

We must first consider what sort of persons our Lord Jesus Christ admitteth to be the visible subjects of his kingdom; and we must be regulated in our determination by respect to his honour, glory, and the holiness of his rule. To reckon such persons to be subjects of Christ, members of his body, who would not be tolerated, at least not approved, in a well-governed kingdom or commonwealth of the world, is highly dishonourable unto him. But so it now is, that let men be never so notoriously wicked, until they become pests of the earth, yet are they esteemed to belong to the church of Christ; and not only so, but



it is thought little less than schism to forbid them the communion of the church in all its sacred privileges. Nevertheless, the scripture doth in general represent the kingdom or church of Christ to consist of persons *called to be saints*, separated from the world, with many things of like nature, I .xv. & xxiv. 3, 4. Eph. v. 27. And if the honour of Christ were of such weight with us as it ought to be, if we understood aright the nature and ends of his kingdom, and that the peculiar glory of it above all the kingdoms of the world consists in the *holiness of its subjects*, such holiness as the world in its wisdom knoweth not, we would more duly consider what persons belong to it, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. An old opinion of the unlawfulness of separation from a church, on account of the mixture of wicked men in it, is made a scarecrow to frighten men from attempting the reformation of the greatest evils, and a covert for the composing churches of such members.

If there be no more required of any, with respect to personal qualifications, in order to constitute them visible subjects of Christ's kingdom and members of his church, but what is required by the most righteous and severe laws of men to constitute a good subject or citizen, the chief distinction between his visible kingdom and the kingdoms of this world is entirely lost. Regeneration is expressly required in the gospel to give right to an entrance into this kingdom. To an interest in the kingdoms of this world no such thing was ever required. So that it must of necessity be something better, more excellent and sublime, than any thing the laws and politics of men pretend to or prescribe, John iii. 3. Tit. iii. 3, 4, 5.

Of this regeneration, baptism is the sign or representation, John iii. 5. Acts. ii. 38. Wherefore, to those who are in a due manner partakers of it, it giveth all the external privileges which belong to them that are regenerate, till the time wherein *personal* performance of the duties whereon the continuation of the state of visible regeneration doth depend, is required of them; and if they fail herein they lose all benefit by their baptism. So speaks the apostle with respect to circumcision under the law, Rom. ii. 25. "For circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." It is so in the case of baptism. Verily, it profiteth; if a man stand to the terms of the covenant which is tendered in it between God and the soul, it will give him a right to all the outward privileges of a regenerate state; but if he do not, his baptism is no baptism, as to a participation of the external rights and privileges, Phil. iii. 18, 19, Tit. i. 15, 16.

God alone is judge concerning this regeneration, as to its internal real principle and state in the souls of men, on which the participation of all the spiritual advantages of the covenant of grace doth depend, Acts. xv. 18, Rev. ii. 23. The church is judge of its evidences and fruits, as entitling to a participation



of the outward privileges of a regenerate state, and no farther, Acts. viii. 13. We shall therefore shortly declare what belongs to the forming of a right judgment herein, and consequently who are to be esteemed fit members of any gospel church.

1. Such from whom we are obliged to withdraw, or withhold communion, can be no part of the constituent matter of a church. But such are all *habitual* sinners, those who having prevalent habits and inclinations unto sins of any kind unmortified, do walk according to them; such are profane swearers, fornicators, covetous, oppressors, and the like, *who shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. Phil. iii. 18, 19. 2 Thes. iii. 6. As a man living and dying in any known sin, that is habitually, without repentance, cannot be saved; so a man known to live in sin cannot regularly be received into any church. For to compose churches of habitual sinners, and that either as to sins of omission or commission, is not to erect temples to Christ, but chapels to the Devil.

2. Those are not meet members for the constitution of a church, who, having once been in church-fellowship, and being admonished of any scandalous sin, have never repented of it, Matt. xviii. 16, 17, 18.

3. They are to be such as visibly answer the description given of gospel churches in the scripture, so that the titles given to the members of such churches may, on good grounds, be applied to them. To compose churches of such persons as do not visibly answer the characters given to them of old, which they were always to be by virtue of the law of Christ, is not church edification: And those who look upon these things by which members of the primitive churches were characterized, viz. *saints by calling, lively stones* in the house of God, *justified, sanctified, separate from the world*, &c. as *peculiar* to these churches, and deny and ridicule the necessity of the same qualifications in present church members,—persons of this sort, I say, form no small part of that woful degeneracy that has befallen the Christian religion. Let it then be considered what is spoken of the church of the Jews in their dedication to God, with regard to their typical holiness, with the application of it unto Christian churches in real holiness, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9, with the description constantly given of them in the scripture, as *faithful, holy, believing*, as the *house of God*, as his *temple* in which he dwells by his Spirit, as the *body of Christ*, united and compacted by the communication of the Spirit, and what is said concerning their ways, walking, and duties; and it will be incontrovertibly evident what sort of persons our church members ought to be;—nor are those of any other sort able to discharge the duties or use the privileges of church members. Wherefore, I say, to suppose churches to consist of such persons who, for the most part, no way answer the description given of church members in their original institution, nor capable to discharge the duties prescribed unto them, but giving evidence of habits and actions inconsistent with those,

is not only to disturb all church order, but utterly to overthrow the ends and being of churches.

4. They must be such as make open profession of subjection of their souls and consciences unto the authority of Christ in the gospel, and their readiness to yield obedience to all his commands, Rom. x. 9, 10, 2 Cor. viii. 5. Matth. x. 32, 33. Luke. ix. 26. This, I suppose, will not be denied; for not only doth the scripture make this profession necessary to the participation of any privilege of the gospel, but the nature of the things themselves indispensably requires that it should be so. For nothing can be more unreasonable, than that men should be taken into the privileges attending obedience to the laws and commands of Christ, without avowing that obedience.

We must here enquire what belongs unto such a profession, as may render men meet to be members of a church. To suppose a profession of religion to accord with the gospel, which is made by many, who openly live in sin, being disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate, is to renounce the gospel itself: Christ is not the High Priest of such a profession. I shall therefore shortly declare what is necessary to this profession, that all may know what is required in order to admission into any of our churches.

1. There is required unto it a competent knowledge of the doctrines and mystery of the gospel, especially concerning the person and offices of Christ. The confession of this was the ground on which he granted the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, or all church power, to believers, Matth. xvi. 17, 18, 19. The first instruction which he gave unto his apostles was, that they should teach men, by the preaching of the gospel, in the knowledge of the truth revealed by him. They are therefore not to be blamed, they do but discharge their duty, who refuse to receive into church-communion such as are ignorant of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; or if they have learned any thing of them from a *form of words*, yet really understand nothing of them. The promiscuous admitting of all persons who have been baptized in their infancy unto a participation of all church privileges, is a profanation of the holy institutions of Christ.

2. There is required unto it a professed subjection of conscience unto the authority of Christ, and particularly a consent to the doctrine of self-denial, and bearing of the cross: For this is made indispensably necessary by our Saviour himself to all that will be his disciples, Matth. x. 37, 38, 39. Mark viii. 34, 38. Acts iv. 10, 11, 20. Acts xxiv. 14; and it hath been a great disadvantage to the Christian religion, that men have not been better instructed herein. It is commonly thought, that whoever will may be a Christian at an easy rate,—it will cost him nothing; but the gospel gives us another account of it, for it not only warns us that reproaches, hatred, sufferings of all sorts, yea, oftentimes death itself, are the common lot of all its profes-

fors who will live godly in Christ Jesus ; but also requires that at our embracing the profession of it, we consider aright the dread of all these, and engage chearfully to undergo them.— Hence, in the primitive times, whilst all sorts of miseries were presented unto them who embraced the Christian religion, their willing engagement to undergo these was a firm evidence of the sincerity of their faith, as it ought to be to us also in times of difficulty and persecution.

3. Conviction and confession of sin, with the way of deliverance by Jesus Christ, is that answer of a good conscience that is required in the baptism of them that are adult, 1 Pet. iii.

4. To this profession is required the constant performance of all known duties, both of piety in the public and private worship of God, and of charity with respect unto others ; to which must be added, a careful abstinence from all known sins, so as not to give scandal or offence, either unto the world or unto the church of God. “ Shew me thy faith by thy works.”

The things ascribed unto those who are to be esteemed the proper subject-matter of a visible church, are such as, in the judgment of charity, entitle them unto all the appellations of *saints, called, sanctified*, that is, visibly and by profession, which are given to the members of all the churches in the New Testament, and which must be answered in those who are admitted into that privilege, if we do not wholly neglect our only patterns. Now, although some of them should not be real living members of the mystical body of Christ, unto whom he is an head of vital influence, yet are they meet members of that body to which he is a head of rule and government, and meet to be esteemed subjects of his kingdom ; and none are to be excluded but such as concerning whom rules are given, either to withdraw from them, or to cast them out of church society, or are expressly excluded by God himself from any share in the privileges of his covenant, Ps. l. 16, 17.

There is nothing more certain, than that evangelical churches, at their first constitution, were made up of such members as we have described, and no other ; nor is there one word in the scripture intimating any concession or permission of Christ to receive those into his church who are not so qualified. Others have nothing to plead for themselves but *possession*, which being ill obtained and ill continued, will afford them no real advantage when the time of trial shall come. Therefore, it is certain that such they ought to be. To say the contrary, would be to affirm, that all the promises and privileges made to the church do belong unto them who visibly live and die in their sins, which would be to overthrow the gospel.

We have in part declared what care and circumspection the church exercised in primitive times about the admission of any into their fellowship, and what trial they had to undergo before they were received ; and it is known also, with what strict discipline they watched over the faith, conversation, and manners.



of all their members. Indeed, such was their care and diligence herein, that at present there is scarce left in some churches the least appearance of their state and manner of rule. Wherefore, some think meet to ascend no higher in imitation of the primitive churches than the times of the Christian emperors, when all things began to rush towards the fatal apostacy—To which I shall attend a little.

Upon the Roman Emperor's embracing the Christian religion, by which not only outward peace and tranquillity was secured to the church, but the profession of Christianity countenanced and rewarded, the care and diligence of the churches about the admission of members were in a great measure relinquished. The rulers of the church began to think that the glory of it consisted in its *numbers*, finding both their own power and revenue increased thereby. In a short time, the inhabitants of whole cities and provinces, upon a bare outward profession, were admitted into churches; and then began the *outward court*, that is, all that belongs to the outward worship and order of the church, *to be trampled on by the Gentiles*. So that this corruption of the church, as to the matter of it, was the means of introducing all that corruption in doctrine, worship, order, and rule, which ended in the great apostacy. For these, especially what concerned practice, were accommodated to the taste of the members of the churches, who stood in need of a mixture of superstitious rites in their worship, for they understood not the power and glory of that which is spiritual; and they were unfit for taking any part in church order, for they were not qualified to bear any share in it; and were such as stood in need of a rule over them, with grandeur and power, like that among the Gentiles. Therefore, the accommodating all church concerns to the state and condition of such corrupt members as the churches were filled with, proved the ruin of the church in all its order and beauty.

At the Protestant Reformation, it also so happened that very little regard was paid thereto. Those great and worthy persons who were called to that work exerted themselves principally against the false doctrine and idolatrous worship of the church of Rome; judging, that if these were removed, the people, by the efficacy of truth and order of worship, would be recovered from the evil of their ways, and primitive holiness restored among them: For they thought it was the doctrine and worship of that church which had covered the people with darkness, and corrupted their conversation. Nor did they absolutely judge amiss herein; for though these were at first introduced in compliance with the ignorance and wickedness of the people, yet they were suited to promote and countenance that ignorance and wickedness. Hence it came to pass that the reformation of the church, as to the purity and holiness of its members, was not in the least attempted, until Calvin set up his discipline at Geneva, which hath filled the world with clamours against him ever since. In



most other places, churches, in the matter of them, continued the same as they were in the Papacy.

But this method was designed, in the holy and wise providence of God, for the good and advantage of the church, in a progressive reformation, as its decay had been gradual: For, had the Reformers in the first place removed out of the church such as were unmeet for its communion, or had they gathered out of them such as were fit members, according to the original constitution of the church, it would, through the fewness of the number of those who could have complied with the design, have greatly obstructed, if not utterly destroyed their endeavours towards the reformation of doctrine and worship. Accordingly, it has been the preaching of the gospel which God hath since made effectual, in these nations and in other places, to turn multitudes “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto himself, translating them into the kingdom of his dear Son.” By this the way is opened for a necessary *addition* to the work of reformation, if not to the finishing of it, which could not at first be attained to, nor even attempted, namely, the reduction of churches, in their matter or members, to their primitive institution.

The sum of what is designed in this discourse is shortly this: We desire no more to constitute church members, and we can desire no less, than what, in the judgment of charity, may comport with the *union* that is between Christ the head and the church, 1 Cor. xii. 27. Eph. ii. 22. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. We desire no more than what is agreeable to the will of God, who adds to the church *such as shall be saved*, Acts ii. 47. The rule of our receiving them is, *because he hath received them*, Rom. xiv. 1, 2, 3. We only desire that profession of faith which was the foundation of the church, and that was not what *flesh and blood*, but what *God himself revealed*, Matt. xvi. 16. We acknowledge, that many church members are not what they ought to be, and that many hypocrites may be among them;—that the judgment which is passed on the confession or profession of those who are admitted into churches is according to charity, and proceeding on evidence of moral probability, not determining the reality of the things themselves;—that there are various measures of knowledge, experience, and readiness of mind in those that are to be admitted—all which circumstances are duly to be considered, with indulgence to their weaknesses:—and if the scripture will allow us any further latitude we are ready to embrace it.

It yet remains on this head to give an answer to the following question: What is our duty, in point of *communion with such churches* as are made up of members *visibly unholy*, or such as have not the qualifications that, by the rules of the gospel, are indispensably required to give them a regular entrance into the church, and a participation of its privileges? For it is in vain to expect that such churches will reform themselves by any act of

their own, seeing the generality of them are averse to and enemies of any such work. To this I answer—

That it must be remembered, that communion with particular churches is to be regulated absolutely by edification ; so that if the corruption of a church, as to the *matter of it*, be such as is inconsistent with that communion that ought to be among the members of the same church in love without dissimulation ;—if the scandal and offences which must of necessity abound in such churches, really obstruct edification ;—if the ways and walking of the generality of their members be dishonourable to the gospel and the profession of it, giving no representation of the holiness of Christ or his doctrine ; and if such churches *cannot and will not* reform themselves—then it is the duty of every man, who is careful of his own present edification and the future salvation of his soul, peaceably to withdraw from the communion of such churches, and to join in churches where all the ends of church societies may in some measure be obtained. Nor can it be questioned by any who understand the nature and ends of evangelical churches, that a departure from the rule of the gospel, as to the practice of holiness, is as just a cause for withdrawing communion from them, as their forsaking that rule in doctrine and worship.

It may still be thought by some, that various inconveniencies will follow on this assertion, when any are inclined to reduce it to practice. But since the matter of fact above mentioned may be proved by incontrovertible evidence, no inconvenience can ensue on this practice in any degree comparable to the *evil* of obliging believers always to abide in such societies, to the ruin of their souls.

We may here observe, that, for the most part, the churches that are now in the world know not *how they came to be so*, continuing only in that state which they have received by tradition from their fathers. But the way in which persons whose characters have been described may become a church, is by a mutual solemn agreement to the performance of all the duties that Christ hath prescribed to his disciples in church fellowship.

That the churches planted by the apostles were particular churches, hath been before proved ; for each of them did consist of many persons, who were in such a manner members of one of them as that they were not members of another. The saints of the church of Corinth were not members of the church at Philippi. And as to the way how those believers in each place came to be a church ; distinct from all others, the scripture affirms in general, that “ they gave up themselves to the Lord, “ and to the apostles, (who guided them in these affairs,) by “ the will of God,” 2 Cor. viii. 5 ; and that other believers were added unto the church, Acts ii. To *give ourselves unto the Lord*, is expressly to engage to do and observe whatever he hath commanded, as that phrase every where signifieth in the scripture.

Were there no other order in particular churches, no other discipline to be observed in them nor rule over them, no other duties, no other ends assigned to them, but what are generally owned and practised in parochial assemblies, the preaching of the word within a certain precinct or boundary, might constitute a church. But if a church be such a society as is entrusted with various powers and privileges, depending on various duties prescribed to it; if it constitutes new relations between persons; if it requires new mutual duties, and gives new mutual rights among themselves, not formerly required of them;—it is in vain to imagine that persons can come into this state by any other means than by their own joint consent and agreement; the supreme cause of all being the will, law, and constitution of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## CHAP. VIII.

### OF THE DISCIPLINE OR RULE OF THE CHURCH.

**N**O person ought to join himself to any church, but where the discipline of Christ is duly exercised by the rules of his prescription. There never was any sect or society of men in the world designed for the preservation and promoting of virtue, and any thing praise worthy, who had not rules of discipline adapted to their ends. Both the constitution and conversation of such societies depend on the special rules of discipline observed in them. To suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his infinite wisdom, hath erected the most perfect society in a church state, for the high ends of religion, of obedience towards God, of love and usefulness among ourselves, hath not appointed a discipline and given rules concerning its administration, is highly injurious to his honour and glory.

There are two parts of the discipline of Christ—that which is *private*, among the members of the church, for the exercise and preservation of love; and that which is *public*, in and by the authority of the rulers of the church, for the preservation of purity and order. A neglect in any of these is attended with pernicious effects.—Indeed the loss and abuse of this discipline, hath ruined the glory of the Christian religion in the world, and brought the whole profession of it into confusion. To this it is owing that the fervency and sincerity of evangelical mutual love have been abated, yea, utterly lost. For the love which Jesus Christ requireth among his disciples, is such as never was in the world amongst men, nor can be in it but upon the principles of

the gospel. It is therefore called his *new commandment*; for little or nothing of the reality of this love, in its due exercise, is to be found among the generality of Christians; and this hath followed on the neglect of evangelical discipline in churches, or turning it into a worldly domination,—for one principle end of it is the preservation of this love. The mutual watch over one another, which is the evidence and fruit of love, that ought to be in all the members of the church is also lost. Most men are rather ready to say, in the spirit and words of Cain, “am I my “brothers keeper?” than to attend to the injunction of the apostles, “exhort one another daily, least any be hardened “through the deceitfulness of sin;” and are unwilling to comply with the command of our Saviour, “if thy brother offend “thee, tell him his fault between him and thee.” By this neglect, likewise, is the purity of communion lost, and those received as members of churches who, by all the rules of primitive discipline, ought to be cast out of them.

The discipline or government of the church is, in general, the exercise of the power and authority of Christ. That there is such an authority is extremely evident from the terms Bishops, Pastors, Elders, Rulers, or Guides, which are frequently repeated in scripture. This authority, however, is neither sovereign, legislative, nor despotic. A pretence of a power to make laws to bind the consciences of men, (which has sprung out of the mystery of iniquity,) is destructive of the kingly office of Christ, contrary to express commands of scripture, and condemned by the apostles. Isa. xxxiii. 22. Jam. iv. 12. Matth. xxiii. 8, 9, 10, 11. Luke xxii. 25, 26. 2 Cor. i. 24. 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23. 2 Cor. iv. 5. But this power and authority to be exercised by the elders, with the consent of the church, is only ministerial and organical. “Our authority “(says Paul) which the Lord Christ hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction,” 2 Cor. x. 8. It is granted unto these, not to reside in them as the power of a king in his own person, but only instrumentally; for it must be the authority of Christ himself, by which the consciences of men are spiritually affected, with regard to spiritual ends; in consequence of which they are bound or loosed in heaven and on earth,—have their sins remitted or retained.

The special design of the government of the church is to represent the holiness, love, compassion, care, and authority of Christ towards it. Whilst this is not attended to, and the officers of the church do not endeavour, in all the exercise of their power and office, to set forth these virtues of Christ, they utterly deviate from the principal end of all rule in the church. For men to act herein in a way of domination, with haughtiness of mind and spirit, above their brethren, by an order and laws of their own devising, without the least consideration of what the Lord Christ requires, and what is the frame of his heart towards all his disciples, is to reflect the highest dishonour



imaginable on Christ himself. But God forbid that Christians should form a judgment of the holiness, wisdom, love, and compassion of Christ, by the representation that is pretended to be made of these in certain courts where church rule and discipline are administered.

The special nature and end of all power granted by Jesus Christ to the church, as has been said, is a ministry unto edification, in opposition to all the ends to which it hath been abused, in the usurpation of a dominion over the persons and consciences of the disciples of Christ, accompanied with secular grandeur, wealth, and power. The Lord Christ never made a grant of any authority, for any such ends, yea, they are expressly forbidden by him, Luke xxii. 25. Matth xx. 26, 27, 28. "Jesus called his disciples unto him and said, ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you—but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

It is evident, that the Lord Jesus Christ doth not in the least reflect on the rule or government of the Kings and Princes of the Gentiles which was good and righteous; yea he represents them as called by their subjects benefactors, for their moderate and equal rule and usefulness. He approves of the administration of their government in the kingdoms of the world; and the power and preeminence was so good and just, not tyrannical and oppressive, that the two disciples desire the like preeminence in his kingdom; which gave occasion to this declaration of the nature of his kingdom and its government. All these things, which are necessary to the maintenance of the authority and power of the Princes of this world, are forbidden by our Saviour to be admitted, on any pretence whatever, in his kingdom. He will have no domination, preeminence in lordly power, no exaltation above others in his church: No Courts, no *coercive jurisdictions*, no exercise of any human authority doth he allow in it; for by these means do the *Princes of the Gentiles*, those that are the benefactors of their countries, rule among them. This is evident from what, in direct opposition to this, he prescribes to his own disciples, the greatest in office, grace, and gifts, namely, a *ministry only*, to be discharged in the way of *service*. How well this great command and direction of our Lord Jesus Christ hath been complied with, by those who have taken on them to be rulers in the church, is sufficiently known.

Now, since there is no rule of the church but what is ministerial, consisting in an authoritative declaration and application of the commands and will of Christ to the souls of men, in which those who exercise it are "servants unto the church

“ for its edification, for Jesus sake,” 2 Cor. iv. 5 ; it follows, that the introduction of human authority of any kind into the government of the church destroyeth the nature of it, and makes his kingdom to be of this world, and some of his disciples like the *Princes of the Gentiles* ; and it is frequently not owing to themselves that they are not more like them than they are.

The church is the *house* of Christ, his *family*, his *kingdom*. To set up any thing, under the name of the *government of the church* which is not derived from him ; or to exercise any power, by processes, rules, and laws not of his appointment, is an invasion of his right and dominion. It cannot be otherwise, if the church be his *family*, &c. ; for what father would suffer any power but his own to be exercised in his family, with respect to the disposal and concerns of his children ? What earthly Prince will bear with such an intrusion into his rights and dominions ? Foreign papal power is excluded in Britain, because it entrenches on the rights of the crown. The judges in our courts of justice are bound to judge and determine in all cases, according to the law of the land ; and when they do not, their sentence is of no validity, but may and ought to be reversed. But if they should introduce laws or rules not legally established in this nation, and judge according to them, it would render them highly criminal. It is no otherwise in the kingdom of Christ, and the government thereof. It is the *holy scripture only*, in which all his laws are recorded, that can operate upon or can have the least power to bind men to obedience. There is nothing left to the elders of the church but the application of these laws, and the general rules of the word to particular cases and occasions.

If the rulers of the church have only a ministerial power,—if, in the exercise of it, they are only the servants of the church to its edification,—if all lordly domination and exaltation above the church or the members of it be forbidden,—and if the whole power and rule of the church be spiritual and not carnal, mighty through God and not through the laws of men, and to be exercised by spiritual means for spiritual ends alone,—it is evident how it hath been lost in the world, for rules and laws, and ways of administration, that cannot be brought to any tolerable consistency with the principles and rules of the government of the church given by Christ himself. This itself is a sufficient reason why those who endeavour to preserve their loyalty entire to Jesus Christ, should, in their own practice, aim at reducing the government of the church to his commands and institutions. Certainly those who love him in sincerity, and have a due honour for the gospel, will, at one time or another, begin to think it meet that this stain of our religion should be wiped away.

I shall now proceed to enquire a little more particularly into that power and authority which is committed by the Lord Christ unto the church for its government and edification.

This I shall discuss, by shewing *how that power is communicated,—what it is,—and to whom it is granted.*

It has formerly been observed, that there was an extraordinary power given to the apostles for the gathering of the churches, which power is now ceased ; and that now this whole church power is committed by Christ unto the whole church ; so that all that are called to the peculiar exercise of any part of it, in virtue of office-authority, do receive that authority from him by the only way of its communication, that is, thro' the instrumentality of the church.

As to the communication of church power, we may observe,

1. Every individual believer hath power or right given to him, on his believing, *to become the son of God*, Joh. i. 12. Hereby he hath, originally and radically, a right and title to all church privileges, to be actually possessed and used according to the rules prescribed by God. For he that is a son of God hath a right to all the privileges of the family of God, and is bound to all the duties of it. Herein lies the foundation of all right to church power, for both it and all that belongs to it, is a part of the purchased inheritance, unto which right is granted by adoption ; so that all church power and privileges are made to believers as such ; only, as such they cannot exercise any church power, but on their due observation of all the rules and duties leading to this end.

2. Wherever there are two or three of these believers, right and power is granted to them to meet together in the name of Christ, for their mutual edification, and with them he has promised his presence, Matth. xviii. 19, 20. I say, to the least number of *consenting believers*, right and power is given them by Jesus Christ, to meet and do any duty in his name ; as, to exhort, instruct, and admonish one another, or to pray together, verse 19. This is a second preparation to the communication of church power. To the former, (becoming a son of God,) *faith* only is required—to this, *profession*, with mutual consent to and agreement in the evangelical duties mentioned.

3. Where the number of believers is increased, so that they are sufficient to observe and perform all church duties in the manner prescribed for their performance, they have right and power granted to them to make a *joint solemn confession of their faith*, especially as to the person and mediation of Christ, Matth. xvi. 16, 18. and to give up themselves to him and to one another, in an holy agreement, to do and observe all things whatever he hath commanded. These believers, thus congregated into a church state, have, by virtue hereof, power to do all things in their order, as by the Lord Christ they are commanded to be done by his church.

This, therefore, is essentially the Church to which the Lord Jesus hath granted all that church power now enquired after, and which he hath made the seat of all ordinances of his worship, and the tabernacle in which he chuses to dwell. Nor is



there, since the ceasing of extraordinary officers, any other possible way for the congregating of any church, than what doth virtually include the things we have mentioned.

But yet this church state is not complete ; for the Lord hath given authority unto his church, to be exercised both in its rule, and in the solemn ordinances of worship,—which, in this state, it cannot observe : Therefore the church in the state above described, hath right and power to call, chuse, and set apart persons meet for the work of the offices that he hath instituted, in the way and by the means that he hath appointed.

We formerly shewed on what the ministry of the church depends, (Chap. VI.) particularly, the necessity of certain gifts and qualifications communicated from Christ, without which it is no more in the power of men to constitute officers than to create or erect an office in the church, Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13. 1 Cor. xii. 4—8. Rom. xii. 6. These, with the way of the call and ordination of officers, will be more distinctly attended to afterwards.

In the mean time we may observe, that with respect to the communication of church power to persons called to office, it is evident that the church doth not give unto such officers, a power and authority that was actually resident in the body of the community, that they should receive and exercise the power of the church in the way of delegation ; for they only design, chuse, and set apart the individual persons who then are entrusted with office power, in virtue of the law of Christ, and thus derive it from himself. They are the *servants of Christ* with respect to their *office* ; and as to its *end*, they are servants of the *church*, for its good and edification.

The whole church is commanded to submit themselves to these officers, who are so appointed, qualified, and called by himself, and to obey them in all things, with the limitations which he hath given to the power of such officers. For, as has been shewn already, they who are called to authority in the church in virtue of their office, are not from this admitted to an unlimited power, but it is bounded as to the objects of its acts, its manner of administration, its acts, and all things in which it is concerned.

It is plain, that all church power is originally given to the church *essentially* considered, which hath a double exercise :—  
1. In their call or chusing of officers ; 2. In their *voluntary* acting with them and under them in all duties of government. All authority in the church is committed by Christ to the officers, with respect to all actions and duties in which office-power is required ; and every individual person hath the liberty of his own judgment, as to his own consent or dissent.\*

---

\* We shall here select a paragraph from one who wrote long before our Author—a man of deep learning, possessed of a primitive simplicity, and



That this power, under the name of the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, was at first given to the whole professing church of believers, and that it is impossible it should reside in any other, has been fully proved by Protestant writers against the Papists, and is undeniably confirmed by these two arguments :

1. The church itself is the Spouse, the Bride, the Queen of the husband and King of the church, Christ Jesus, *Pl. xiv. 10.* John iii. 29. Rev. xxi. 9. and xxii. 17. *Matta. xiv. 1, 5, 6.* Other spouse Christ hath none, nor hath the church any other husband. Now, to whom should the keys of the house be committed but to the bride ? The Pope claims the keys to be his own, and so makes himself the head and husband of the church ; but he proclaims himself to be not only an adulterer with that harlot which he calls the church, but also a tyrant,—for, pre-

peculiarly mighty in the scriptures, as is evident from his writings ; and who suffered persecution for religion. “ All the actions of the church (says he) being but the practice and performance of God’s law, as the members have their portion in the general, so have they also in the particulars, each one according to his place, calling, and measure of grace given him from Christ the head.—The churches in the apostles days had this right and liberty ; for the multitude of believers were both *BEHOLDERS and ACTORS*, in all their common affairs ; as at the choice and ordination of church officers, *Acts i. 15, 16, 23.* and *vi. 2, 3, 5.* and *xiv. 23* ; at the deciding of questions and controversies, *Acts xv. 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 22, 23.* and *xxi. 22.* *1 Cor. vi. 2.* &c. at the excommunication or casting out of impenitent sinners, *Matt. xviii. 17,* *1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 13* ; at the choice and appointment of men to carry the grace or benevolence of the saints to their needy brethren, *2 Cor. viii. 19.* *1 Cor. xvi. 3* ; at the receiving and reading the apostles letters, *Rom. i. 7.* *1 Thes. v. 27* ; and generally, in the public communion and fellowship of the apostles and one another, *Acts ii. 41, 42.* &c. They were also commanded to exhort and admonish one another, *1 Thes. v. 14.* *2 Thes. iii. 14, 15.* even the officers of the churches, *Colos. iv. 17* ; and to mark the causes of division and offences, and to look that no root of bitterness did spring up, lest thereby many should be denied, *Heb. xii. 15.* These and the like privileges, in the faith and practice of the gospel, are given to all saints, in all churches ; which they must use with discretion, order, and peace, *Rom. xii. 3, 6.* *1 Cor. xiv. 39, 40* ; not presuming above their calling and place, or the measure of their understanding ; nor abusing their liberty, to the trouble or annoyance of their brethren : And therefore elders, *1 Tim. v. 17.* or governors, *1 Cor. xii. 28.* *Acts xx. 17, 28.* are set to rule the people, and together with the other officers, to manage the church affairs. By which means confusion is avoided, and order is observed in the assemblies ; as was in the primitive churches, where the overseers and public ministers propounded, discussed, and managed matters in seemliness and peace, *Acts i. 15.* and *xv. 6, 7, 13.* These guides are to be heard, revered, and submitted to in the Lord, *Heb. xiii. 7, 17* : They attend to the public service in the church, and are as the hand, mouth, and eyes of the same. By such God of old signified his will to the people, *Exod. xix. 3, 7, 8* ; and by such Christ gave admonition to the churches in Asia, when he directed his epistles to the angels, *Rev. ii. 1, 8, 12, 18.* and *iii. 1, 7, 14.* the contents of which concerned, and were to be signified unto the whole churches, *Rev. ii. 7, 11, 29.* And these officers, that thus go before, help, direct, and govern their brethren, are not to in-croach upon their freedom or power in any thing ; for be they ever so great, they are not their own, but the churches to whom they minister, *1 Cor. xiii. 22, 23* ; the churches being Christ’s and Christ God’s.” **AINSWORTH ON COMMUNION.**

tending to be her husband, he will not trust her with the keys of his house, which Christ hath done to his spouse.

The officers or rulers of the church belong unto her as her own, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. "Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos," &c.—and "stewards in the house," 1 Cor. iv. 1—the "servants of the church for Jesus' sake," 2 Cor. iv. 5.

If the Lord Christ have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that is, of his own house, Heb. iii. ; if the church itself be the spouse of Christ, the mother of the family, Psalm lxxviii. 13. the bride, the lamb's wife ; and if all the officers of the church be but stewards and servants in the house and unto the family ; if the Lord Christ make a grant of these keys unto any, on which the disposal of all things in this house and family do depend ;—the question still recurs, To whom hath he originally granted them—whether to his HOLY SPOUSE, to dispose of according to her judgment and duty,—or to any SERVANTS in the family, to dispose of her and all her concerns according to their pleasure ?

2. The power of the keys as to binding and loosing, and of consequence with respect to all other acts proceeding from these, is expressly granted to the whole church, Matth. xviii. 17, 18. "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church ; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." What church it is that is here intended we have proved before, and that the church is entrusted with the power of binding and loosing. What part the body of the people hath herein, the apostle declares, 1 Cor. v. 4. 2 Cor. ii. 6.

How far the government of the church may be denominated democratical, from the necessary consent of the people, I shall not determine ; but this consent, and liberty to that purpose, are absolutely necessary according to the law of obedience unto Christ, which requires, that all they do in compliance therewith be voluntary and from a sense of duty.

That the beautiful order that Christ hath ordained may be preserved, due respect must be given to the elders ; the church must "regard them as over them in the Lord." When this is not the case, and when the people consider the elders as having no more interest in managing church affairs but their own suffrages, disorder and confusion will ensue. If any, on the other hand, should take advantage of the caution now hinted, and say, that where the people have their due liberty granted to them, they are apt to assume that power which does not belong to them,—an evil that tends to anarchy,—let them remember, that upon the confinement of power and authority to the guides or rulers of the church, they have changed the nature of church power altogether, and enlarged their usurpation, until the whole government of the church has issued in absolute tyranny. There-

fore, no fear of consequences that may ensue from the darkness, weakness, lusts, corruptions, and secular interests of men, ought to entice us to the least alteration of the government of the church, by any prudential provisions of our own.

That those who are called to rule in the church may preserve the respect and reverence due to them as the servants of Christ, they ought to evidence their right to this appellation, as well as give their words and actions their just influence, by endeavouring to encrease in that wisdom which is necessary to the right discharge of their office.

The wisdom necessary to the government of the church, is not an acquaintance with the constitution and proceedings of what are called *ecclesiastical courts*, which, in their origin, power, manner of proceeding, &c. partake more of the nature of secular Law Courts. Those who exercise this sort of government are ready to expose the ignorance of the people and their unfitness to interfere with church affairs; and reckon it an insult on *their* wisdom that such a practice should be allowed. To such I freely confess, that in the knowledge and proceedings of such courts, none of the people are equal to them, or will contend with them; for the government that they exercise is not that scriptural government which the meanest Christian may easily discern.

The skill, then, of the officers of the church for its government, is a spiritual wisdom and understanding in the law of Christ, with an ability of mind to make application of it, to the edification of the church in general, and all the members of it respectively, by a ministerial exercise of the authority of Christ, and a due representation of his holiness, love, care, compassion, and tenderness toward his church.

By the *law of Christ* is meant the declaration of his mind and will, in his institutions, commands, prohibitions and promises; an understanding of which, with skill for using it, must be the whole of the wisdom under consideration. This wisdom is to be acquired in a way of duty, by prayer, meditation, and study of the word. For the most part, no sort of men are greater strangers to this wisdom than those who are eminently skilled in the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts.

It is to be remembered, that in this ability of mind to make application of the law of Christ, diligence, care, watchfulness, and spiritual courage are included. Some are to be admonished; some to be rebuked sharply; some to be cut off: In which cases the government must be conducted with a spirit of boldness and courage.

The acts and duties that belong to government may be reduced to three heads.

1. The *admission* and *exclusion* of members; both which acts are founded in and warranted from the light of nature and rules of equity. Every righteous society, coalescing upon known



laws and rules for its regulation, hath naturally a power inherent in it to receive into its corporation such as they judge fit for being members when they voluntarily offer themselves, and also to reject or withhold the privileges of the society from such as refuse to be regulated by its laws. This power is inherent in the church essentially considered, by virtue of their *mutual confederation* before the instating of officers in it. But, when the church is organised, the key of rule is to be committed to the elders of the church, to be applied with the *consent*\* of the whole society

2. The direction of the church, in all the members of it, to the observance of the rule and law of Christ in all things, to his glory and their own edification. These may be included in the following particulars: 1. Mutual, intense, peculiar *love* among themselves, to be continually exercised in all the duties of it. — 2. *Personal holiness*, in gracious moral obedience — 3. *Usefulness* towards the members of the same church, towards other churches, and all men, as occasion and opportunity require — 4. The *due performance* of all those *duties* which all the members of the church owe mutually to each other, by virtue of that place and order which they hold in the body. About these things is government to be exercised, for they all belong to the preservation of the being of the church and the attainment of its ends.

3. To this belongs the *disposal of the outward concerns of the church* in its assemblies, and in the management of all that is performed in them, that “all things may be done decently” and in order;” as the regulation of speeches and actions, the appointment of seasons for extraordinary duties, according to the rules of the word.

The change of this government of the church was gradually introduced, by an advantage taken from the unmeetness of the people to be led by this spiritual rule. For the greatest part of these that then made up Christian churches, having become ignorant and carnal, that rule which consists in a spiritual influence on the consciences of men, was no way able to retain them within the bounds of outward obedience. There was therefore *another kind* of government judged necessary to retain them in any order or decorum: And it must be acknowledged, that where the members of a church are not in some degree spiritual, a rule that is wholly spiritual will be of no great use. But this change was principally introduced by those that were in possession of the rule itself; and proceeded from two causes: 1. Their unskillfulness in the management of this spiritual rule, or want of the duties which are required in it. The perpetual labour, and

---

\* The CONSENT, or concurrence, of the whole church, here mentioned, must be some way expressed so as to be known; which necessarily supposes that it is previously asked.



exercise of the graces necessary to it, disposed them to desert it, and to embrace another more easy and suited to their inclinations. 2. An eager desire for the secular advantages of profit, honour, and veneration, which presented themselves in another kind of government. By these means was the original government of the church utterly lost, and a worldly domination introduced in its place. But the delineation that hath been given will sufficiently demonstrate, that all these disputes and contests which are in the world, between the church of Rome and the rest, about church power and government, are entirely foreign to the Christian religion.

---

## CHAP. IX.

### SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

THE principal objection to congregational churches, and in favour of the exclusive power of officers, is taken from the meeting at Jerusalem; where, in order to support the idea of classical churches, our opponents alledge that there were several congregations; and to give countenance to such a power, they tell us that the decision was solely an act of authority and government in the apostles and elders over all the Gentile churches.

With regard to the first part of the objection, we shall repeat an argument which has already been used, and is sufficient to prove that the scripture knoweth nothing about churches national or classical of any sort. The argument is this—that when the scripture speaks of an individual church, it calleth it *the church* of such a place; but when it speaks of a province, the churches there are never called *the church* of such a province, but uniformly the *churches*. Hence we read of the *churches* of Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Galatia, and Macedonia, several of which were but of small extent.—If a person were speaking of the churches in Essex, Suffolk, Hartfordshire, and other counties, without mentioning any classical church to which they belong, he would be thought to speak rather in the congregational dialect than in that of our opponents.

To put it beyond doubt that the church of Jerusalem was congregational, (and not classical, or consisting of several congregations, which is mere presumption, in direct opposition to the tenor of the scripture language) we are assured that they frequently met together, Acts ii. 1, 44, 46, 47. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place—And all that believed were together—

“ And they continued daily with one accord in the Temple—  
 “ And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be  
 “ saved. Acts iv. 31, 32. And when they had prayed, the  
 “ place was shaken where they were assembled together ;—  
 “ and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart  
 “ and of one soul. Acts v. 12, 13. And they were all with  
 “ one accord in Solomon’s Porch.—Acts vi. 2, 3—5. Then  
 “ the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples—Brethren,  
 “ look out among you seven men—And the saying pleased the  
 “ whole multitude.”\*—Notwithstanding the great number of  
 original converts in this church, who probably were many of  
 their strangers, occasionally present at the feast of Pentecost,  
 and there instructed in the knowledge of the truth, that in the  
 several countries whither they immediately returned, they might  
 be instruments of propagating the gospel; yet it is certain that  
 many years after it consisted of no greater multitude than could  
 come together in one place for the management of church affairs,  
 Acts xv.

To the second part of the objection, viz. the exclusive power  
 of officers, in synods or assemblies over many particular churches,  
 we answer, that the authority of a synod determining articles  
 of faith, constituting decrees for the conscientious observance of  
 things of their own appointment, to be submitted to and obeyed  
 on the reason of that authority, under the penalty of excommuni-  
 cation, or the same authority acted in a way of jurisdiction over  
 churches, is a mere human invention, for which nothing can be  
 pleaded but the prescriptions of the fourth century, when the  
 progress of the fatal apostacy became visible. The apostles ne-  
 ver gave such a rule; they laid no such yoke on the necks of the  
 disciples, which might prove heavier than that of the Jewish  
 ceremonies they had taken away. Sovereignty over their consci-  
 ences was reserved by the apostles unto the authority of Christ  
 alone, and the obedience required by them was only *unto his*  
*commands*. But what some would be at is this: To presume  
 that they themselves are the church,† and to assume to themselves

\* We are also told of different congregations being at Ephesus, from the  
 great number of believers there. But this can have no more weight than  
 what is said about Jerusalem; for we are expressly assured that Paul and  
 the disciples commonly assembled together in the School of one Tyrannus,  
 Acts xix. 9. We are also certain that the church at Corinth assembled in  
 one place, 1 Cor. v. 4. & x. 20. From these testimonies we have reason to ad-  
 mire the wisdom of the Spirit, in so distinctly recording the meeting of these  
 churches in one place, when we reflect on what fabricks have been raised  
 on the pretence that they did not meet together.

† The human systems of church government seem to depend on two hy-  
 potheses, both equally false. The one is, that there were more congregati-  
 ons than one in Jerusalem. The other is, that the passage in Matth. xviii.  
 “ Tell the church,” is to be understood of a Church Court. The church in  
 this place has been claimed and eagerly contended for by Popes, Prelates,  
 and Presbyterians. Indeed some of the last of these classes are beginning  
 candidly to give up their former views, and to confess that a church repre-  
 sentative is what the scriptures know nothing about; and that the Church  
 in this passage ought to be rendered the Congregation, as is every where

power to impose what they please on all churches who are under their jurisdiction, provided they judge it lawful, be it ever so useless or trifling; and then assert, that the people must quietly submit to and comply with their determinations, unless they would wish to be esteemed schismatics. But it is too late to advance such principles.

As a great deal of argument is founded on the xvth of the Acts both by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, our author's observations on the transaction there recorded, deserve particular attention.—He observes,

The Jews were at this time divided into three sorts: 1.—Such as being obdurate in their unbelief and rejection of the person of Christ, opposed and blasphemed the gospel in all places. These the apostle describes 1 Thes. ii. 13, 14, 15. 2.—Such as professed faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel, but were of the mind that the whole law of Moses was not only to be continued and observed among the Jews, but also that it was to be imposed on the Gentiles who were converted to the faith. They thought the Gospel did not require a new church state, with a new kind of worship, but was only a peculiar way of proselyting men to Judaism,—against whom the apostle disputes in his epistle to the Hebrews, particularly in the 7th and 8th chapters. The *teachers* of this sort troubled the churches, even after the declaration of the mind of the Holy Ghost by the apostles. 3.—There were others who, though they acquiesced in the liberty of the Gentiles, yet judged themselves, and all other circumcised Jews, obliged to observe the law and its institutions.

Now, the occasion of this meeting was a difference in the church of Antioch, which was one of the first churches among the Gentiles. This difference arose about the imposing of the Ceremonial Law, and which the church could not themselves compose, seeing the false teachers pretended the authority of the apostles at Jerusalem, from whence they came, as is evident from verses 1, and 14. A voluntary reference was therefore made by the church at Antioch to that at Jerusalem, where, as was pretended, the difference originated, to the danger of their mutual communion: Verse 2—"The Brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem." The persons of which this Synod† or meeting

---

signifies in the New Testament, except where the catholic church is spoken of. This is plainly giving up their system, for our Lord, in the place alluded to, admits of no higher court on earth than this church, by adding immediately, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," &c.

† The word *SYNOD* is not a scriptural term. It simply means a Meeting or Assembly; but it is very evident that the meeting at Jerusalem has almost none of the lineaments of the Synods that have arisen in the later ages,

was composed, were the Apostles, Elders, and BRETHREN of the church at Jerusalem, and the messengers of that at Antioch, with whom Paul and Barnabas were joined in the delegation.—The matter in difference was debated, as to the mind of God concerning it, from the scripture.—The determination of the meeting was no act of church government or authority, but a *doctrinal declaration* of the mind of the Holy Ghost. It is competent for any church of Christ to make such a doctrinal determination; for it is the “ground and pillar of truth.”

There was nothing *new* imposed on the Gentile churches; only a direction is given, in one particular instance, with respect to duty, and necessary, on several accounts, to Gentile converts, namely, to abstain from fornication, and from such practices in the use of their liberty, as might be productive of offence to their Jewish brethren. But this was the duty of all Christians even before this determination, and is so still, in many other instances besides those mentioned in the determination. Therefore,

The determination is, that no impositions be made on the consciences or practice of the disciples of Christ in things relating to his worship, but what are necessary by virtue of divine institution.

The grounds on which they proposed that the determination should be received, were that what they had determined was the mind of the Holy Ghost; “It pleased the Holy Ghost and us.” This they knew either by immediate revelation, or by what was written and recorded in the scripture; the latter of which, (the written word) is evidently the way intended. Another ground is, that the things determined were necessary previous to the determination. They also proposed them as being the duty of the Gentile converts, with respect to their peace and mutual communion with the Jewish churches: *Doing this*, say they, *ye shall do well*, which is all the sanction of their decree; and this manifests it was *doctrinal*, not *authoritative* in a way of jurisdiction.†

either national or provincial. For Antioch was a city in a different nation, and under another civil government. The said meeting was not composed of the elders of the different churches of Judea already planted; we do not even hear of the elders of the church at Antioch being there. The meeting was only occasional, not standing. The Christians at Antioch did not think proper to consult the churches in their own nation, but they chose the fittest to give advice on the subject, viz. that at Jerusalem, seeing the false teachers pretended authority from thence. The messengers from Antioch seem to have had no more footing in the meeting than commissions, and were done when they had delivered their message; unless we suppose them members of the church at Jerusalem, which they were not. Now it was the apostles and elders of the church that gave the advice; so that the whole amounts only to this, the voluntary reference of one church or congregation unto another, for advice in a matter that respected their edification; and this can and will be observed by congregational churches to the end of the world.

† Although the false teachers had subverted the faith, and against their



The recommendation to the Gentile Christians with respect to some things in the case of scandal, they call "the imposing of no other burden," in opposition to what they rejected, namely, the imposing a yoke of ceremonies upon them, verse 10. So that the meaning of these words is, that they would lay no burden on them at all, but only advise them unto things necessary for the avoiding of scandal. Indeed, it is impious to imagine, that the apostles would impose any yoke, or lay any burden on the disciples, but the yoke and burden of Christ, for this would have been contrary to their commission, Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

Here we see the advice, consultation and consent of the brethren so fully expressed and exemplified in each of the two great churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, that they cannot be contradicted. Paul and Barnabas, and the other messengers were sent by the brethren or church at Antioch, verses 1, 3; and when they were come to Jerusalem they were received by the church, as the brethren are called in distinction from the apostles and

---

own light, had wrested their doctrine to be the doctrine of the apostles, which being so scandalous a sin that it deserved the highest censure; yet they proceeded not to censure them, either by admonition or excommunication, which are acts of government; but they only declare their sin and error, and give their judgment about it. Nor do we find any summons sent for these disturbers, or that they were ever sent to Jerusalem to receive the censures, in which government doth properly consist, the subject-matter sent for their decision being merely doctrinal, about this question, v. 2. namely, whether the Ceremonial Law was to be observed, v. 5.---Neither do the titles given to these determinations argue a jurisdiction, being called *TA DOGMATA*, and *TA KEKRIMENA*, Acts xvi. 4. For although the word *DOGMA* be used for an imperial decree, Luke ii. 1. yet this is rarely the case; and it is more commonly used (as Stephanus and Budocus observe) for doctrine and opinion in matters moral or speculative, as *DOGMA PLATONIS*, the doctrine of Plato. Further---The subject-matter of this decision being about rules and ceremonies, and the non-observance of them, the *DOGMA* is elegantly used in opposition to those who taught and observed such rules, who are said *DOGMATIDZEIN* in so doing, Col. ii. 20; being led away by the false *DOGMATA*, or doctrine of false teachers.--As to the word *KEKRIMENA*, translated *ORDAINED*, it is the same word that James used, chap. xv. 19; *KRINO*, "my judgment is," which being voted by the rest they are said *KEKRIMENA*; denoting, that these determinations were their joint, declared, and avowed judgment; and so answereth to these words in their letter, "It seemeth good unto us, being assembled with one accord." Neither do the words "To lay no other burden" import jurisdiction; for it is well known that in scripture language, to teach and declare, though by way of doctrine, and to press men's consciences with things as the commands of God, is said to be a binding, and imposing a burden on them. So the Pharisees were said to bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and to lay them on men's shoulders; which is only spoken of a doctrinal declaring and pressing men's consciences with the rigour of the law. This is so well known to be the language of the Jews, that it need not be insisted on. But it does not follow, that those who lay these burdens by way of doctrine, may proceed to censure for the neglect of them; for every minister hath a doctrinal authority to urge and declare the commands of Christ, yet he cannot, hath not power to censure (in the exercise of discipline) without others in conjunction with him."---REASONS of the DISSENTING BRETHREN in the Westminster Assembly, page 33 and 34.

elders, verse 4. So when the apostles and elders assembled to consider of the case proposed unto them, the whole *multitude of the church*, that is, the brethren, also assembled with them, verses 6, 12: Nor were they mute persons, mere hearers and spectators in the assembly, but they concurred both in the debate and determination of the question; which is evident from their being expressly joined with the apostles and elders in the advice that was given, verses 22, 23. And when Paul and Barnabas returned unto Antioch, they gathered together the multitude, or brethren to whom the letter of the church at Jerusalem was directed, and delivered it, verses 23, 30. Unless this be observed, the primitive church state is overthrown.

*Object.* By separating from certain churches, we are said to be guilty of schism, breakers of the peace and unity of the church, the cause of endless separation, &c.

To which we answer in general—that certain men pretending to be the church, take upon themselves to make rules, which shall determine with respect to all church unity, order, and peace. But before we can find ourselves interested in these things, all that has been pled for the true state and nature of evangelical churches must be overthrown, which we trust will not soon be done; railings and reproaches will not do it. Till this be done, however, it will be believed that every *particular congregation* is indispensably obliged, in itself, to observe and do all the commands of Christ, and so to regulate the outward circumstances of its order and worship as is best for its own edification, and of which, itself is the most competent judge. As to a church of another sort, invested with authority to make rules and impose the observance of them on a multitude of other congregations, without their own consent, and which they judge not for edification, it is evidently not from heaven but of men. If churches and Christians were left to that liberty which Christ hath purchased for them, and with which he hath made them free, then those who first should break unity and order, would indeed be guilty of, and could not avoid the charge of schism.

The terms *unity* and *schism* have varied in their meaning, to answer all the new forms of churches that have been erected. We shall therefore make some observations on these, in order to illustrate their true nature, and to vindicate ourselves, from the charges of our opponents.

There was a certain way found out, and carried on in a mystery of iniquity, by which those meek, holy, humble churches or societies of Christ's institution, who had nothing to do with the things of the world, in power, jurisdiction, &c. in consequence of having got the advantage one of another, arrived at great secular glory. During the progress of this apostacy, church unity and schism declined from their centre, and varied according to the present interest of those that were at the helm of affairs. Whoever had got possession of the *name* of the church,

in prevailing reputation, though the state of it was ever so corrupt, made it bite and devour all that disliked it, and would swear that submission to them in all things was church unity, and to dissent from them was schism.

But schism has a reference unto the deportment of men with respect to the institutions of Christ. Contentions, divisions, or separations amongst men, about that order, agreement, or uniformity which are of their own appointment, notwithstanding all the moral evil they contain, do not belong to that church-schism under consideration.

The primitive notion of schism was, a division or alienation of affection among members of *the same church*, all abiding in the same outward communion, without any separation. It includes the following things: 1. A want of that mutual love, condescension, and forbearance, which are required in all the members of the same church, with the moral evils of whisperings, backbitings, and evil surmises, which are the natural consequences thereof. 2. An undue attachment to certain church officers above others, causing disputes and janglings. 3. Disorder in attendance unto the duties of church assemblies, and the worship of God performed therein. These are the only views of schism exemplified in the scripture, the only evil that is condemned under that name, as will appear to any one who shall read with care the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, in which alone the nature of this evil is specified. We readily grant that every separation from a true church upon any unwarrantable pretext is schism, which also happened in the succeeding ages: But what we mean to shew at present is, that the above description of it has been almost wholly lost; for, whatever men do in churches, provided they do not depart from their outward communion, it would be accounted ridiculous, by the generality of churches, to call them schismatics. It is the above view of schism that ought principally, if not solely, to affect the consciences of men, if they are careful about avoiding its guilt. But this notion of it, not being suited to the interest or advantages of men, nor any way subservient to the securing of their inventions and impositions, is lost in the world.

When things of this nature come to be well understood, the world will be delivered from innumerable fruitless contests, princes from all disturbance on account of religion, and private persons from the fatal mistake of implicitly trusting the eternal concerns of their souls to one church and not to another; the disciples of Christ will yield obedience to all his commands, and cease to be the servants of men. Then it will be evident, that what hath been contended for with respect to power, privileges, authority, preeminence, jurisdiction, catholic unity, ways of worship, rule and discipline, that make such a noise in the world, and concerning which such various pretences have been made, that cannot be applied to such Christian congregations as we have described,—I say, it will then appear, that all these



are but the effects of the prudence, or rather *imprudence*, of men. But to return from this digression.—

We are told, that all Christians are under strong obligations to preserve the peace and unity of the church.

It is readily allowed, that we are obliged to “ follow peace with all men, to seek peace and pursue it;” and “ if it be possible, to live peaceably with all men.” It is also granted, that we are under peculiar obligation to seek the peace and prosperity of the whole visible church of Christ on earth, and as we have opportunity to do good to the whole household of faith; and, considering the differences among professors, the doing so is as strong an evidence as any thing can be of evangelical love. But with respect to a certain peace and unity of the church, which, it is said, we are bound to preserve, we must remark, that there may be an agreement, and some kind of peace and unity in evil. These are highly pretended to in the church of Rome. There may be peace and uniformity in any false and heretical church; the unity of Simeon and Levi, brethren in evil. But the peace and unity which we are obliged to observe in particular churches, is the consent and agreement of the church in general, and all the members of it, walking under the conduct of their guides, or presbytery, in a due observance of all the institutions and commands of Christ, performing towards the whole and each other the mutual duties required by him, from a principle of faith and love. This, and this alone, is that unity and peace, which we are peculiarly obliged to preserve in particular churches; what is more than this, relates to the general commands of love, unity, and peace mentioned above.

Further---It is the duty of every church to be the ground and pillar of truth, to hold fast the form of wholesome words, or to keep the truth pure and uncorrupted. Every private man's profession is included in the public profession of the church or assembly to which he belongs. Unity or agreement in the faith whereby we come to have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, is the foundation of all church communion, and if taken away, the whole fabrick falls to the ground. Yes, we add that whatever acts of worship or church order men may be agreed in the practice of, if the foundation of that agreement be not laid in a joint communion in faith and love, they are neither accepted with God nor profitable to themselves. These enliven all joint duties of church order and worship, and are their very life and soul.

But among the many evils prevalent in the profession of religion, and controversies about it, this is one of the greatest,—that men are inclined to lay more weight upon a few forms and observances, which have come into some men's minds, nobody knows how, than upon the most important duties and graces of the gospel. Hence, communion in faith and love is scarce reckoned worth the taking up in the streets, in comparison of uniformity in these human inventions. Let men be as far removed from true gospel faith and love as can be supposed, if they qui-



etly comply with and shew a little zeal for these outward things, they are to be approved of as very good, orderly members of the church. And whatever evidences, on the other hand, any can and do give of their communion in faith and love with all that are of their communion, yet if they cannot in conscience comply with these things now mentioned, they are to be judged guilty of schism, and breakers of the unity of the church; although no part of the churches unity does, or ever did consist in any such.

It has already been observed, that when a person joins himself to any church, it becomes a part of his religious profession, not only that this church is a true church, but that there is in its state and acting, a due representation of the mind of Christ, with respect to what he requireth of his churches. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, and in all things that belong unto this profession, we declare that we do it in compliance with his will. This we cannot do in any church, where we are convinced the commands of Christ are not observed, without making ourselves hypocrites, and reflecting the greatest dishonour on Christ and the gospel. He does not deserve the name of a Christian who will praise any thing in religion that he does not approve of, and by which truth and holiness are affected. Such a conduct tends to atheism, and naturally begets such a frame of mind as an honest heathen would scorn. Men ought and should be allowed to declare what they approve and what they do not. Sincerity and openness in profession are indispensably necessary to salvation. Therefore, to instruct men to do what they do not think it their duty to do, but only hope they *may do it* without sin, is to instruct them in debauching their consciences, to the ruin of their souls. "Let every one be persuaded in his own mind; for "what is not of faith is sin."

Now, the churches, separation from which is judged sufficient to render us guilty of breaking church unity, and liable to the charge of schism, are unscriptural in their constitution. They are churches without church power, and in which the discipline of Christ is not observed, although it be just as necessary to the growth and vigour of a church in the spiritual and divine life, as physic, in a multitude of cases, is to the health and vigour of the natural body. In consequence of offences not being removed, by the application of the laws of Christ, brotherly love is entirely lost. In short, they are without those fruits of righteousness, which are the immediate ends of church societies, and the principal means by which God is glorified in the world.

Churches of this description undoubtedly need great reformation; but that too is utterly impracticable, the rulers and body of the people being wholly averse to any such undertaking. From all which it appears that these are not true churches of Christ; therefore we see no warrant in all the New Testament

to join in, but express injunctions to separate from their communion.

But (says a learned opponent) these arguments will make separation endless; which is to suppose all the exhortations of the scripture to peace and unity among Christians to no purpose. But why so? Is there nothing in the authority of Christ, and the sense of that account which is to be given to him? Nothing in the rule of the word, the labour of the ministry, and exercise of gospel discipline, to keep the professed disciples of Christ to their duty, and within the bounds of order divinely prescribed, unless they are fettered and staked down with human laws and constitutions? These are sufficient to bind the consciences of believers. The Lord Christ hath commanded love and union among his disciples; he hath ordained order and communion in his churches; he hath both given and limited their power; he hath prescribed rules by which they and all their members ought to walk; he hath forbidden all schisms and divisions; what he hath done is the only means to preserve his own disciples from all sinful separation, and is sufficient for that purpose. Here lieth the original mistake in this matter; we have lost this apprehension, that the authority of Christ in the rule of his word, and work of his spirit, is every way sufficient for the guiding, governing, and preserving of his disciples in that church order which he hath prescribed, and the observance of the duties that he hath commanded. This authority hath been greatly lost in the world for many ages; and instead of the rulers faithfully endeavouring to revive a sense of it on the consciences of all Christians, they have widely departed from it, trusting more to ways of their own devising. But for my part, I shall never desire nor endeavour to keep any from schism and separation, but by the ways and means of Christ's appointment, and by a sense of his own authority on their consciences.

The Rev. Dr. Stillingfleet asserts, that our way would make an union among the Protestant churches impossible, supposing them to remain as they are.

To this we say, that the affecting of such an union has been attempted by many. Private persons, princes, and synods have earnestly engaged in it. I wish they had never mistaken it, in stating the nature of that union, which, in this case, is alone desirable, and alone attainable. After the trial of an hundred and fifty years, it is altogether in vain to expect that any farther union should be effected by any of the parties giving up the principles to which they have been so long accustomed, and for which they have so long contended.

In this state of things, I say, the principles we proceed upon are the most expedient towards procuring peace and union among these churches, and without which it will never be effected. I shall therefore mention those that have this tendency.

1. The first is the absolute necessity of a general reformation in life and manners of all sorts of persons. It is sufficiently

known into what a woful condition the profession of the Protestant religion hath fallen. How little evidence is there left of the power of evangelical grace working in the hearts of men ! How little diligence in the duties of holiness and righteousness ! And what indications are these of the displeasure of God against us on account of these things !—Now, without reformation, union will be of no use to the honour of religion, the glory of Christ, or the good of the souls of men.

2. That all these churches at variance be taught to give up with matters of indifference and small moment, but which are the cause of many fore divisions, that they may unite their general force and interest, in opposition to the kingdom of Satan and Antichrist in the world. It hath been frequently observed, that the nearer some men and churches are in their profession, the more distant they are in their affections ; as the Lutherans in many places do more hate the Calvinists than the Papists. This makes it evident, that in many cases the want of peace and union do not proceed from the things themselves wherein they differ. This evil can no otherwise be cured than by such a reformation as shall in some measure revive primitive simplicity, integrity, and love, such as were among the churches of the converted Jews and Gentiles, when they walked according to the *same rule* in what they had attained, forbearing one another in love, with respect to the things wherein they did differ. Until this also be effected, all endeavours towards further union, whilst these differences continue (which they seem to do unless the whole frame of things in Europe were to be changed by some great revolution) will be in vain.

Were these things conscientiously insisted on, out of a pure love to Jesus Christ, and zeal for his glory, I mean primitive simplicity and love, without minding those things that came into some men's heads, in what manner nobody knows ; it would be of more advantage than innumerable wrangling disputes about certain points in difference, would have more happy effects than the exactest methods in contriving formularies of consent, or synodical conferences of the parties at variance, with all their solemnities, orders, limitations, precautions, concessions, and obligations. Let men say what they will, it must be the revival, flourishing, and exercise of evangelical light, faith, and love, that shall heal the differences and breaches that are among the churches ; nor shall any thing else be honoured with much influence in that work.

3. Where men are inevitably hindered from full communion with any church, by impositions with which they cannot comply without sin, or, by continuing in it, are deprived of the proper means of their edification, and this church to which they belong refuse reformation,—it is lawful for them, in obedience unto the law of Christ, to reform themselves, and to use the means appointed by him for their edification, constantly abiding in the communion of all true churches, the nature of which we have



described. When the corruption of a church is such, that the Lord may justly withdraw his presence from it, and is thus exposed to his righteous indignation, it is as proper and reasonable that those who are convinced of it should take care of themselves, as it would be in the case of a city on fire, for any of the citizens to preserve their own houses if possible, although the Mayor and Aldermen should neglect the preservation of the city.

4. Another of our principles tending to union is,—That all communion of churches as such consists in the communion of faith and love, in the administration of the same solemn ordinances, and common advice in things of common interest. All these may be observed, when, for various reasons, the members of them cannot have local communion in some ordinances with each church. If this truth were well established and agreed upon, men might easily be convinced that there is nothing wanting to that evangelical union among churches which the gospel requires, but simply their own humble, holy, peaceable, Christian-like walking in their several places and stations. But where men put their own interests and the possession of present advantages, into conditions of communion, covered with the pretence of things necessary, or divest it of that latitude which Christ hath left it, by new limitations of their own, it will never be attained on the true evangelical principles from which it must proceed. For, however any be offended, I must assert and maintain, that there is nothing required by our Lord Jesus Christ to this communion of churches, nor to any other end of church order and worship, but only an actual exercise of evangelical grace in obedience to him.

These are the principles on which we proceed in all that we do; and they are so far from being an obstruction to the peace and union of the Protestant churches, that without them they will never be attained or promoted. I do therefore beg that our opponents would not despise these things, but would have them to know assuredly, that nothing would be so effectual to a warrantable union as an universal reformation of all sorts of persons, according to the rule and law of Christ; for woe will be to us, if, while we contend about outward peace and uniformity in matters of little moment, we neglect to make peace with God.

Another objection, similar to the last, is, that our way weakens the cause of Reformation. We shall therefore shew, that so far are our principles from weakening the Reformation, that, on the contrary, they strengthen it.

There were some general principles on which the Protestants proceeded in their separation from the church of Rome, and which they constantly pleaded in their justification.

The first was, that the word of God is a perfect rule of faith and religious worship, so that nothing ought to be admitted which is repugnant to it,—nothing imposed that is not prescribed therein; and that every one is at liberty to reject any thing



not contained therein. To prove this to have been their principle in their separation from the church of Rome, were to light a candle to see the sun. It were easy to fill a volume with testimonies of it. But afterwards, this great and fundamental principle of the Reformation was almost utterly destroyed, when the interests of men led them to except from this rule; for no certain bounds can be assigned to those things that are exempted from the regulation of the scripture. This hath occasioned the rise of all endless differences and schisms among us, and which will not be healed until all Christians are restored unto their liberty, so as to be under no obligation to any thing in the matters of religion, but only the authority of the scriptures.—The words of Mr Chillingworth are emphatical to this purpose, which I shall therefore transcribe.

“Require (saith he) of Christians only to believe Christ, and to call no man master but him only; let those leave off claiming infallibility who have no right to it; and let those who disclaim it in words disclaim it likewise in their actions. In a word, take away tyranny, which is the devil’s instrument to support errors, superstitions and impieties in the several parts of the world, which could not otherwise long withstand the power of truth; I say, take away tyranny, and restore Christians to their just and full liberty of captivating their understandings by the scripture only, that universal liberty, thus moderated, may quickly reduce Christendom to truth and unity.” Part i. Chap iv. Sect. 16.

This fundamental principle of the first Reformation we do not only firmly adhere to, rejecting all those opinions and practices by which its force is weakened, but also do willingly suffer the things that befall us in giving our testimony to it. There are but few persons who are capable to discern the subtilty of the reasonings which are applied to weaken this principle. But all men can easily see, that the sufficiency of the scripture in general as to all the ends of religion, is the only foundation they have to rest upon. They may see, that where men go about to prescribe things not appointed in the scripture, no two churches have agreed in them, but endless contentions have followed. No man can give an instance of any thing that is necessary to the rule of the church, or the observance of the commands of Christ in divine worship, that is not contained in the scripture; and on this account, we resolve to call no man master but CHRIST, admitting of nothing in religion but what is warranted by his word.

2. The second principle of the Reformation on which the Reformers justified their separation from the church of Rome, was this,—That Christians were not tied up to blind obedience unto church guides; and were not only at liberty, but also obliged to judge for themselves with respect to all things they were to believe and practise in religion and the worship of God. They knew that the whole fabric of the Papacy stood on this

basis, namely, that the people were ignorant, and were to give an implicit obedience to their pretended guides. That this obedience might be secured, they took from them the only means of their instruction, the use of the holy scriptures. But the first Reformers did not only vindicate their right to the use of the scripture itself, but insisted on it as a principle of the Reformation, without which they could never have carried on their work, that in all concerns of religion they should judge for themselves; and multitudes of the people quickly manifested how worthy they were to have this right restored to them, by laying down their lives for the truth, and suffering as martyrs.\*

This principle of the Reformation is also in no small degree weakened by many in denying to the people the liberty to judge what is meet for their own edification. This is almost the same with that of the Pharisees concerning these who admired and followed the doctrine of our Saviour, John vii. 49—"This people (in the Greek, this *rabble*) which know not the law." Nevertheless, it was this people whom the apostle directed to choose out from among themselves persons meet for an ecclesiastical office, Acts vi.—the same people who joined with the apostles and elders in the consideration and determination of the grand case concerning the continuation of the legal cere-

\* We shall here transcribe a passage from an author who died some time ago, in his twenty-seventh year. "The church of Rome (says he) has deservedly been held up to public ridicule, for her pretensions to infallibility, and for keeping the people in ignorance, by prohibiting the reading of the scriptures; happy day that was therefore which began the dawn of Reformation. But does it not lead us back to Rome, to condemn free inquiry, from the fear of innovation? What essential difference is there between having the scripture wholly kept from our eyes, and suffering our understanding, judgment, and conscience, to be limited by confessions of faith, church authority, &c.? Do not these limitations tend to shut us up in as gross darkness as our ancestors were covered with by their receiving papal tradition in the room of divine Revelation? The preaching of Fulgentius at Venice, on Pilate's question, WHAT IS TRUTH? is not foreign to our purpose. He told his hearers, that at last, after many researches, he had found it out, and holding out a New Testament, said, that it was in his hand; but he put it in his pocket, and coldly added, "THE BOOK IS PROHIBITED." What difference would there have been, had he said, "You may read the book, but its true meaning is prohibited?" But what has been the consequence of introducing this method of preventing heresies and schisms? Plainly this (not to say any thing about excommunication, &c.) many have, as it were insensibly, been led to make tradition and church authority their faith; and have become the dupes of superstition, while they have professed to be guided by the word of God! Yet since all spirits must be tried by the scriptures, since all true church authority must be founded there—and since if any man speak not according to the form of sound words recorded there, it is because there is no light in him, where can Christians appeal, but to the scriptures. These, they are well assured, are able to make them wise unto salvation, through Jesus Christ. Speaking of his own performance, he adds, "If ten thousand writers, in the highest reputation for orthodoxy, could be produced in confirmation of what is here said, unless they were prefaced with, "THUS SAITH THE LORD," they will only stand as so many insignificant cyphers, in the esteem of those who have "an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—ECKING'S Preface to his Essays.

monies, Acts xv.—the same to whom all the apostolic epistles, excepting those to particular persons, were written; and to whom such directions were given, and duties enjoined, as suppose not only a liberty and ability to judge for themselves in all matters of faith and obedience, but also a special interest in the order and discipline of the church—those very persons who were to “say unto Archippus (their bishop), take heed to the “ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it,” Col. iv. 17. Further, it is this very people who are commanded to examine and try antichrists, spirits, and false teachers, that is, all sorts of heretics, heresies, and errors, 1 John, chap. ii. and iii. &c.—that people, who, in the following ages, adhered to the faith, when almost all their rulers were become Arian heretics, and kept their private conventicles in opposition to them, at Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and other places; and who were many of them burned in this country by their own rulers for the judgment they formed of errors and heresies.

This principle of the Reformation, in vindication of the rights and privileges of the Christian people, to judge for themselves in matters of religion, and to join freely in those church duties which are required of them, we do assert and maintain. Yea, we meet with no opposition more fierce, than on account of our maintaining the liberties and rights of the people with regard to church order and worship. But I shall not be afraid to say, that as the Reformation was begun and carried on on this principle, so when this people, through an apprehension of their ignorance and unfitness, are excluded from judging for themselves with respect to their own duty in matters of religion; or when through their own *negligence* and *viciousness*, they are really incapable of managing their own interest in church affairs, (being fit only to be governed, if not as brute creatures, yet as mute persons;) and while these things are improved by the ambition of the clergy engrossing all power in the church to themselves,—if the old POPEDOM do not return, a new one will be erected as bad as the other.

3. Another principle of the Reformation is, that there was not any catholic, visible, organized, governing church traced by succession to that of Rome, whence all church power and order was derived. I will not say this principle was absolutely received by all the first Reformers in *this* country; yet it was by the generality of them in *other* places of the world. For they constantly denied that there was any catholic church, but the invisible, consisting of elect believers. They believed that Rome is mystical Babylon, the seat of the apostatized church of the Gentiles, devoted to destruction; and could acknowledge no such church state in the Roman church, nor the derivation of any power and order from it. So far as there is a declension from this principle, so far the cause of the Reformation is weakened.



This principle we do firmly adhere to ; and not only so, but it is also known, that our fixed judgment concerning the divine institution, nature, and order of evangelical churches, is such as entirely excludes the Roman church from any pretence unto church state, order, or power. From this it may be judged who they are that do most weaken the cause of reformation, we, or they by whom we are opposed.

[Among other things, our Author alludes to this principle, seemingly prevalent both among Episcopalians and Presbyterians, namely, That the continuation of the church, and an eldership or gospel ministry, depends on what is called a successive ordination, or a flux of power descending from the ordainers to the ordained, plainly implying that power is communicated, and persons are constituted office-bearers, rather by this clerical ordination than by the voice of the church. This popish principle is sufficiently confuted and exposed in chap. 6. It seems very plain, that in the setting apart of office-bearers, they who ordain are only the mouth of the church, observing that order which Christ hath appointed. This rule with respect to ordination ought to be strictly observed in all ordinary cases. But there may extraordinary cases or certain emergencies occur, in which the observance of it is not practicable. In these we are not required to perform impossibilities. However tenacious some have been of this principle, yet, in some cases they have found themselves under the necessity of dispensing with it ; and so virtually acknowledging that the power is lodged in the body of the people, and not solely in the church rulers. We have several instances of a recent date. At the commencement of the Secession, the separating ministers were formally divested of all authority to preach, by the courts of the church of Scotland ; but having the voice of their people, they considered themselves authorized ministers of Christ. The Burghers and Antiburghers are another instance. Notwithstanding the former were deprived of all church authority by the latter, yet the former, as they had the voice of their people, ceased not to exercise their ministry.]

## CHAP. X.

### THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH.

**W**E observed, that the church is considered either as *essential*, that is, with respect to its nature and being, or as it is *organized*, with respect to its order.



The organizing of a church is the instating in it those officers which the Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed. The officers of the church are of two sorts, Bishops and Deacons, Phil. i. 1.—and their work is divided into Prophecy and Ministry, Rom. xii. 6, 7.

The first sort of officers in the church are Bishops or Elders ; concerning whom there have been mighty contentions in the late ages of the church. But the principles we have proceeded on free us from having any special interest in the controversy. For if there be no church of apostolical constitution, none in being in the second or third centuries, but only a particular congregation, the contest about power in the same person over many churches falls to the ground ; and in like manner, and for the same reason, falls the power assumed by every sort of church courts, where a few individuals manage all the concerns of many congregations, denying to all the other members, however numerous, worthy, or wise, all interest in the transactions of these courts, except *petitioning and obeying*.

Indeed, strife about power, superiority, and jurisdiction, amongst those who pretend to be ministers of the gospel, is full of scandal.\* It started early in the church, was extinguished by the Lord Christ in his apostles, and rebuked by the apostles in all others. Matth. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4. chap. xxiii. 7—11. Luke xxii. 24—27. 1 Peter v. 1—5. 2 John 9, 10. Nevertheless, through the pride and ambition of men, this hath been the stain of the church in most ages. For neither the sense of the authority of Christ forbidding such ambitious designs, nor the proposal of his own example in this particular case, nor the experience of their own insufficiency for the least part of the gospel ministry, have been able to restrain the minds of men from coveting and contending for a prerogative in church power over others. For though this ambition, and all the fruits and rewards of it, are laid under a severe prohibition by our Lord Jesus Christ, yet when men (like Achan) saw the wedge of gold and the goodly Babylonish garment that they supposed in this power and jurisdiction, they coveted them, and took them.

If men would but a little seriously consider what there is in that care of souls, even of all them over whom they pretend rule and jurisdiction, and what it is to give an account concerning them before the judgment-seat of Christ, perhaps it would lessen their earnest contending for the enlargement of their authority.

In order to explain the evangelical pastoral office, I shall first adduce the arguments which undeniably prove, that in the whole New Testament, bishops and presbyters or elders are every way the same persons, in the same office, and have the same function, without distinction in order or degree.

---

\* This sort of authority (as one observes) over brethren grows apace in the soil of corrupt nature. It is a vile weed that fills the world ; but what a pity it should be suffered to grow in gardens !---MORRICE'S Dialogues.

1. The apostle describing what ought to be the qualifications of *presbyters* or *elders*, gives this reason for it, *because a bishop must be so*, Tit. i. 5, 6, 7. *Ordain elders in every city, if any be blameless, &c. for a Bishop must be blameless.* To suppose the apostle does not intend the same persons and the same office, by presbyters and bishops in the same place, is to destroy his argument, and render the context of his discourse unintelligible. He that would say, "If you make a Justice of Peace he must be "magnanimous, liberal, full of clemency and courage, for so a king ought to be," will not be thought to argue very wisely. Yet such is the argument here, if by elders and bishops, distinct orders and offices be intended.

2. There was a plurality of bishops in one city, in one particular church, Phil. i. 1. "To all the saints that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." That the church then at Philippi was one particular church or congregation, was proved before.

3. The apostle being at Miletus, sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church there, Acts xx. 17, 18. Unto these elders he says "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *bishops*, to feed the church of God," verse 28. If the elders and bishops be not the same persons, having the same office, the same duties, and the same names, it is impossible, so far as I understand, how it should be so expressed; for these elders are they whom the Holy Ghost made *bishops* or *overseers*, as it is rendered in our version, the original word being the same for both.

4. The apostle Peter writes to the *elders of the churches*, that they should feed the flock, *EPISKOPOUNTES*, taking the oversight, or exercising the *office and functions of a bishop*, over them; and that not as lords, but as examples of humility, obedience, and holiness to the whole flock, 1 Pet. v. 1, 2, 3. Therefore those elders to whom this apostle wrote were *also bishops*; which shows they are only different names of the same office. And such were the *HEGOUMENOI*, or *guides* (in our version rendered *rulers*) of the church at Jerusalem, whom the members of it were to obey, as those that did watch for, and were to give an account of their souls, Heb. xiii. 17.

The substance of these, and all other instances and testimonies of the same kind, is this: Those whose names are the same, equally common and applicable unto them all, whose function is the same, whose qualifications and characters are the same, whose duties, account, and reward are the same, concerning whom there is in no one place of scripture the least mention made of inequality, difference, or preference in office, they are essentially and every way the same.

We now proceed to speak more particularly concerning the PASTORAL OFFICE.

The name of a pastor, or shepherd, is metaphorical, It is a denomination suited to his work, 1 Pet. v. 2. *POIMAINATE*, *EPIS-*

*KOPOUNTES, feed, taking the oversight.* It seems to be applied to this office, because it is more comprehensive of all the duties that belong to it than any other name whatever; nay, than all of them put together. The grounds and reasons of this metaphor, or why God termeth himself the Shepherd of the flock, why the sheep of this flock are committed unto Christ, by which he becomes the good Shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep, and the prince of shepherds; what interests men in a participation of this office, and what are their consequent duties,—I lay these are things well worth the consideration of those who are called to the exercise thereof. For hirelings, yea wolves and dumb dogs, take upon themselves to be shepherds of the flock, by whom it is devoured and destroyed.

This name or appellation includes in it *love, care, tenderness, watchfulness*, in all the duties of *going before, preserving, feeding and defending* the flock, the lambs, the strong, the weak and diseased, with accountableness as servants to the Chief Shepherd; therefore it was generally disused in the church, and those of bishops or overseers, guides, presidents, elders, which seem to include more honour and authority, were retained in common use. One of the names, viz. *bishops*, at last obtained the preeminence, which was afterwards compounded with another dignified word, and thus arose the name *arch-bishops*, as little known in the scripture as an *arch-prophet*: Out of such compositions brake forth the *cockatrice* of the church, that is, the *Pope*.

Christ himself, in his own person, and by his own authority, was the author of the pastoral office. He gave it, appointed it in the church, by virtue of his sovereign power and authority, Ephes. iv. 11, 12. 1 Cor. xii. 28. He appointed this office to abide in the church unto the consummation of all things, Ephes. iv. 13. Matth. xxviii. 19. And therefore the apostles, in obedience to the divine command, took care that pastors, elders or bishops, should be called and ordained to the discharge of this office in all churches, Acts xiv. 22, 23. 1 Tim. iii. 12. Tit. i. 5. In this he hath given a rule to be observed by the churches to the end of the world.

Our Saviour hath also appointed a standing rule for the calling of men unto this office, as we shall see immediately. But if men may enter upon it, and discharge it without any such call, his rule is altogether vain. There is an accountable trust committed to those who undertake this office. The whole flock, the ministry itself, the truths of the gospel, with respect to their preservation, are committed to them, Col. iv. 17. 1 Tim. vi. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 2, 16, 23, &c. they who must give account. They are stigmatized as very wicked who attempt any such thing among men; and what shall he be esteemed who intrudes himself, in the name of Christ, into the highest trust that any creature is capable of, and takes upon him to give an account of its discharge in the day of judgment, without any call or divine warrant? It is also to be observed, that there are special promises granted

unto the discharge of this office, both in present aid and future reward, to which those who take it upon themselves without a divine call can have no claim.

What hath now been said concerning intrusions on the pastoral office is not intended to hinder **THE MUTUAL EXERCISE OF GIFTS**. For many things performed in virtue of office, may be done by others not called to office, in a way of love. Such are the duties of exhorting, admonishing, comforting, instructing, and praying with and for one another. Men often are converted unto God by the occasional dispensation of the word by those who are not called unto office; for it is *the gospel itself* that is the power of God unto salvation by whomsoever it is administered. It is frequently so in the exercise of spiritual gifts by them who are not stated officers in the church. 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. Phil. i. 14, 15, 18. 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. In the first churches, not only some, but all who had received spiritual light, in the gifts of knowledge and utterance, did teach and instruct others as they had opportunity; hence the apostle Peter, in the place just quoted, enjoins, that “as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.—If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory,” &c. On this account, the heathen philosophers of old objected to the Christians, that they suffered weavers and cobblers to teach among them; but they who knew that Paul himself, their great apostle, wrought at a trade not much better, were not offended at it. Of this sort were the disciples mentioned, Acts viii. 4. So was Aquila, chap. xviii. 26: And the many prophets in the church of Corinth, 1 Epist. xiv.

It was remarked, Chapter III. That Christ hath appointed such a church state as is suited to the mutual exercise of all gifts and graces, and not such a one as is fitted to obstruct this exercise: That whatever church state does not contribute to, this end, is not of his appointment: That he gives neither gifts nor graces merely for the person's self, but also for the good of others, 1 Cor. xii. 7. “The manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” Accordingly he hath appointed particular congregations, in whose assemblies alone they can be duly exercised, in consequence of which all his disciples are mutually edified, that is, increased in knowledge, faith, love, fruitfulness in obedience and conformity to himself. It was also observed, that what keeps either life or soul in Christian love, consists in the mutual exercise of the graces and duties of exhortation, administration, prayer, and watchful care over one another, without which it will not, and cannot be preserved. But what hath been said on the benefits arising from mutual edification, by no means hinders that the administration of the



glorious gospel of the blessed God be committed unto the pastors of the church.

But to return to the pastoral office. The call of persons to it consists of two parts. 1. Election. 2. Ordination or sacred separation by fasting and prayer. With respect to election, several things must be attended to.

1. That which necessarily is previous to it, is the meetness of the person to be chosen for his office. It can never be the duty of the church to call or chuse an unqualified person to this office. No pretended necessity, no outward motives, can warrant a church so to do; nor can it, by any outward act, whatever form or solemnity be observed, communicate ministerial authority unto persons utterly unqualified for, and incapable of the discharge of the pastoral office, according to the rule of the scripture. This hath been one great means of debasing the ministry, and almost ruining the church, by the neglect of those who suppose themselves entrusted with the whole power of ordination. Persons must have qualifications, as previous indications of the mind of God. And if we would know what these qualifications are, we may learn them in their great example and pattern, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He being the good Shepherd, whose the sheep are, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, the chief Shepherd, did design in the undertaking and exercise of this pastoral office, to give an example unto all those who are to be called to the same office under him. And if there be not a conformity unto him in this, no man can assure his own conscience or the church of God, that he is lawfully called unto this office. The gracious qualities of Christ's mind and soul in the discharge of his pastoral office may be referred unto four heads.

1. The communication of the Holy Ghost unto him in an unmeasurable fulness, whereby he was fitted for the discharge of his office. This is expressed with respect to his undertaking, Isa. xi. 2, 3. chap. lxi. 1, 2, 3. Luke iv. 14. Herein was he anointed with the oil of joy above his fellows, Heb. i. 9. This unction of the Spirit is in a certain measure required in all who are called unto the pastoral office, Eph. iv. 7. And where there are not, in some competent degree, the spiritual gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and utterance, no outward call can constitute any man an evangelical pastor.

2. Compassion and love to the flock were gloriously eminent in this great Shepherd of the sheep. After other evidences of this, he gave them that signal confirmation of it in laying down his life for them. This testimony of his love he insists upon himself, John x.; and this his example ought to be continually before the eyes of those who are called unto the pastoral office. Their entrance to this office should be accompanied with love to the souls of men; and if the discharge of it be not animated with love to their flocks, wolves, hirelings, or thieves they may be, but shepherds they are not. The glory of the gospel-ministry is not more defaced in any thing, than in want of con-

formity unto Christ in love to the flock. Alas! it is scarce once thought of by the most of these who take upon them the pastoral office. Where are the fruits of it? What evidence is given of it in any kind? It is well if some, instead of laying down their own lives for them, do not destroy their souls.

3. There is in this great Shepherd a continual watchfulness over the whole flock, to keep, to preserve, to feed, to lead, and cherish it, to purify and cleanse it, until it be presented unspotted unto God. He doth never slumber nor sleep; he watereth his vineyard every moment, keeps it night and day that none may hurt it, and loseth nothing of what is committed to him; see Isa. xl. 11. In this also is the Lord Christ to be our example. To this belong—constant prayer for the flock,—diligence in the dispensation of the word, with wisdom as to times, seasons, the state of the flock in general, their light, knowledge, ways, walking, ignorance, temptations, trials, defections, weaknesses, growth and decays,—personal admonition, exhortation, consolation, instruction, as their particular cases requires,—all with a design to keep them from evil; and to present them without blame before Christ Jesus at the great day.

4. Zeal for the glory of God in his whole ministry, and in all the ends of it, had its continual residence in the holy soul of the great Shepherd. Hence it is given by an expression intimating that it was *unutterable*. “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” This also must accompany the discharge of the pastoral office. The want to it is one of those things which hath filled the world with a dead, faithless, fruitless ministry.

5. As he was absolutely in himself holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; so a conformity to him in these things, and that in some degree of eminence above others, is required in them who are called to this office.

Besides these qualifications, persons must be set apart unto this office according to the mind of Jesus Christ. The manner of which will soon come under consideration. We shall say something with regard to *the means of judging and ascertaining a person's meetness for this office*.

1. It is to be determined by the evidence he has given of his possessing the qualifications now mentioned. The church is not to call any one to office who is not known unto them; of whose frame of spirit, and manner of walking, they have not had some experience; not an upstart, or one lately come unto them. He must be one who by his carriage and deportment hath obtained *a good report*, even among *them that are without*, (unless they be enemies and scoffers;) and one that hath in some good measure manifested his faith in, and love and obedience unto Jesus Christ in the church. This is the chief *trust*, that the Lord Christ hath committed unto his churches; and if they are negligent in this, or if, at all adventures, they will impose an officer upon him, an officer in his house, without satisfaction of his *meetness* upon

due enquiry, it is a great dishonour to him, and a sufficient cause for his provocation. In the choice of officers, churches are principally made the overseers of their own purity and edification. To deny that they have ability for judging in this matter, or a liberty for the exercise of it, is error and tyranny.—Where there is a defect in this personal knowledge we are speaking of, for want of opportunity, it may be supplied by testimonies of unquestionable authority.

2. The meetness of a person, for this office is to be determined by *trial* of his gifts for edification. These are the spiritual endowments which the Lord Christ grants, and the holy Spirit works in the minds of men, for this very end, that the church may be profited by them, 1 Cor. xii. 7. And we must take it for granted, that every true church of Christ, is able to judge in some competent measure what gifts of men are suited to their own edification. The churches mentioned in the scripture ordained and appointed by the authority of Jesus Christ, were originally nothing but a certain number (generally small) of men and women converted to God by the preaching of the gospel, with their baptized seed, associating themselves in obedience to Christ's commands, and by the direction of his apostles, for the common profession of the same faith, the obedience and performance of all divine institutions of religious worship, unto the glory of God, their own edification, and the conversion of others. These believers thus associated in societies, not being complete as to their church state until they were supplied with the ordinary officers of bishops and deacons, and knowing the command and appointment of Jesus Christ by his apostles to that purpose, *did chuse from among themselves* proper persons for these offices, according to the order of his own institutions, 1 Tim. iii. 1—16. Tit. i. 5—10. Unto these offices they were solemnly set apart, by the apostles themselves, with fasting and prayer, and imposition of hands, and by other ordinary officers after their decease.

These things we shall now endeavour to confirm, by shewing it to be the mind of Christ, that the election or call of persons to office is an act of the whole church, with their officers, if they have any previous to the election.

This was the way and method of the call and setting apart of all ordinary officers, both under the Old Testament and the New. It is founded in the light of nature.

The first instance of the choice of a church officer was in the case of Matthias, Acts i. As he was able to be a church officer, he had the choice and consent of the church; and as he was to be an apostle, or an extraordinary officer, there was an immediate disposition of him into his office; the latter to give him apostolical authority, the former to make him a precedent and pattern for the future actings of the church in the choice of their officers.

I say this being the first example and pattern of the calling of any person to office in the Christian church state, in which there

was an interposition of the ordinary actions of men, it is established as a rule and precedent, not to be departed from in any age of the church whatever. Therefore, I cannot but wonder how men dared ever reject this divine example and rule. It will not avail them to say, that it is only a matter of fact, and not a precept or institution that is recorded. For, 1.—It is a fact left on record in the holy scripture for our instruction and direction. 2.—It is an example of the apostles and whole church proposed unto us, which, in all things not otherwise determined, hath the force of an institution. It is a matter of common right, determined and applied by the wisdom of the apostles, and the whole number of believers at that time in the world, and it is impious to depart from it, unless in the case of the utmost necessity.

The case here recorded being the call of an *apostle* strengthens the argument; for if, in the *extraordinary call* of an apostle, it was the mind of Christ that the multitude should have the liberty of their suffrage, how much more is it certainly his mind, that in the *ordinary call* of their own peculiar officers, this right should be continued?

The order of the procedure of the church herein is distinctly declared. The number of the church at that time was about one hundred and twenty, verse 15. They were assembled altogether in one place, so that Peter stood up in the midst of them. Peter, in the name of the rest of the apostles, declares to them the necessity of choosing one in the room of Judas, ver. 16—20. He limits the choice to the special qualification of being a proper witness of the resurrection of Christ, and who constantly accompanied him with themselves from the baptism of John, when our Saviour was baptised, and began his public ministry. Among these they were left at liberty to nominate any two, who were to be left to the lot for a determination which of them God designed to the office. Upon this, the whole multitude appointed two; that is, the men and brethren unto whom Peter spake, did so, ver. 16. The same persons *prayed, and gave forth their lots*, ver. 24, 26; and then, Matthias was, by the common suffrage of the whole church, reckoned unto the number of the apostles.—I say not that these things were done in distinction from Peter and the rest of the apostles, but in conjunction with them.

The second example we have of the practice of the apostles in this case, whereby the preceding rule is confirmed, is given us in Acts vi. in the election of the deacons. Had there ensued, after the choice of Matthias, an instance of a different practice, by an exclusion of the consent of the people, the former might have been evaded as extraordinary, and not binding on the church. But this was the very next instance of the call of any church officer; and was the first appointment of any ordinary officers in the Christian church. This being in the year of Christ's ascension, there are no ordinary elders distinct from



the apostles mentioned ; and the apostles abiding as yet at or about Jerusalem, were able to take care of the rule of the church and the preaching of the word. They are indeed mentioned as well known in the church not long afterwards, chap. xi. 30. The first election of deacons, however, with the occasion of them, are recorded ; concerning which we may observe,

1. That the institution of the office itself is of apostolical authority.

2. That the church was greatly multiplied at that time on account of the conversion to the faith mentioned in the foregoing chapter. It is probable that most of them were returned to their own habitations ; for the next year, there were churches in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, chap. ix. 31. And Peter went through all quarters to visit the saints, ver. 32. of whose conversion we read nothing, but that which took place at Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost.

3. This whole multitude assembled in one place, being congregated by the apostles, ver. 2. who would not exert their authority, nor determine any thing in which the church were concerned, without their own consent.

4. The church judged on the whole matter proposed to them, and gave their approbation, before they entered on the practice of it, ver. 5. *the saying pleased the whole multitude.*

5. The qualifications of the persons to be chosen are declared by the apostles, ver. 3. " of honest report, and full of the holy " Ghost and wisdom." These the people were also to judge upon.

6. The choice is wholly committed to them by the apostles, as what did of right belong to them—*Look ye out among you ;* which right they also practised, choosing them to the office by their common suffrage. The apostles use the words of Moses, or words of the same import, with respect to the choice of the rulers, Deut. i. 13, marg. *Give to yourselves wise men ;* which when they had done, Moses set them apart.

7. The church also, having thus chosen fit men, presented them, as their elected officers, to the apostles, in order to be set apart by them to their office, v. 6.

It is impossible there could be a more evident, convincing instance and example of the free choice of church officers by all the members of the church, than is here given : Nor was there any other reason why this order and process should be observed, or why the apostles would not themselves nominate and appoint persons whom they knew to be meet to receive this office, but only that it was the right and liberty of the people, according to the mind of Christ, to choose their own officers, and which the apostles would not infringe.

It were well if some would consider how the apostles then treated the multitude of the people, who are now so much despised, and utterly excluded from all concern in church affairs, but what consists in a servile subjection. If there were nothing

in this, but a record of the wisdom of the apostles in the management of church affairs, it is marvellous to me that any who would be thought to succeed them in any part of their office, should dare to depart from the example set before them by the Holy Ghost.

Nothing can be weaker than the pretence, that this being the election of deacons to manage the *alms* of the church, nothing can be inferred with respect to the right or way of calling *bishops, pastors, or elders*, who are to take care of the *souls* of the people; and that they may be able to judge of the fitness of persons for the former, but not for the latter. For,

1. We have a rule concerning the call of persons to office in the church in general, to which no objection is any where founded. 2. If the people are meet and able to judge of those who are *of honest report*, and *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*, which is here required, they are able to judge who are meet to be their pastors. 3. The argument holds strongly on the other side, namely, that if it be *right and equal*, if it be of divine appointment and apostolical practice, that the people should choose those who are to collect and distribute their charitable benevolence, much more are they to enjoy the same right and privilege in the choice of their pastors, to whom they are to submit themselves in the Lord.

2. Accordingly they used the same liberty in the choice of their elders, Acts xiv. 23, CHEIROTONESANTES, &c. "appointing, ordaining, creating elders by election, or the suffrage of the disciples, having prayed with fasting," as Erasmus, Vatablus, Beza, and all our old English translators, render it.

The word CHEIROTONEO is but once more used in the New Testament, 2 Cor. viii. 19, where it plainly signifies the election of a person to an employment, CHEIROTONETHEIS, &c. "He was chosen of the churches to travel with us.\*" But the sense of the passage is fully confirmed by the apostles directing the church, on all occasions of like nature in which they were concerned, in their right and use of their liberty with respect to the election of persons to office. Besides the place just cited, "the apostles and elders, with the whole church, sent chosen men of their own company to Antioch," Acts xv. 25. that is, such as they chose by common suffrage for that end. So again, "I will send whom you (the church) shall approve" 1 Cor. xvi. 3.

Now, the whole order of the sacred separation of persons qualified to be bishops, elders, or pastors, is clearly represented in the place under consideration.—They were chosen by the people, the apostles who were present, namely Paul and Barna-

---

\* Our Author also establishes this meaning of the word from the LXX. ; and particularly from the Greek Historians, from whom it was originally borrowed, and who used it with respect to the election of Officers and Magistrates by the whole assembly of the people.

bas, presiding in the action, directing it, and confirming it by their consent—A time of prayer and fasting was appointed, as the duty of the church on such occasions—When they were so chosen, the apostles present solemnly prayed, whereby their ordination was complete—This was done in every church, or in every congregation; namely, in all the particular congregations that were gathered in those parts. For the collection and constitution of churches did always precede the election and ordination of their officers, as is plain in this place; also Tit. i. 5. So far is it from truth, that the *being* of churches depends on the successive ordination of their officers, that they are always churches essentially considered previous to the being and call of the officers.†

It is evident that the election of officers by the body of the people arises from the fundamental principles of the constitution and nature of gospel churches. And,

1. The calling of bishops, pastors, or elders, is an act of the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. But these keys are originally given to the whole church; and to the elders of it only ministerially, as has already been proved. With respect to exercise, pastors are *eyes* to the church; but God and nature design sight to the whole body, to which it is given both as its subject and end, although it is peculiarly seated in the eye.

2. This right, exemplified in apostolic practice, is included in the commands given to the church, in a multitude of places, to discern and try false prophets, to fly from them; to try spirits, or such as pretend spiritual gifts or offices; to reject them who preach false doctrine; to attest those in office to other churches—all which do suppose a right to chuse the worthy and reject the unworthy. See Matth. vii. 17. John v. 39. Gal. xi. 9. 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 21. 1 John iv. 1. 2 John 10, 11. As to the objection urged from the *unfitness* of the people to form a proper judgment in this case, we answer,—that since it proceeds upon a supposition of that degenerate state of churches, as to knowledge, wisdom, and holiness, into which they are for the most part fallen, it cannot be allowed to have the force of argument in it, because it is to be *lamented*, and ought to be *reformed*.

3. The church is a *voluntary society*. Persons of their own will and free choice coalesce in it. This is the origin of all

† It is presumed, that the meaning of a CHURCH ESSENTIALLY CONSIDERED will now be plain to almost every reader; yet for the sake of some it may be repeated,—that it is the body of Christians professing the same faith, before the election of any officers at all. In this state, they can admit and exclude members; because it is in the body of professing believers that all that power is lodged which Christ hath given to his church. They can also pray with, exhort, and edify one another. But in this state they are not complete;—therefore it is their duty, as soon as convenient, to chuse pastors or elders to administer solemn ordinances, and other pastoral duties, together with the other officers, and then they become a fully organized church. This our Author illustrates in Chap. VIII.

churches, as hath been declared : “ *They gave themselves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God,*” 2 Cor. viii. 5. Here neither by prescription, tradition, nor succession, (when first coalesced) hath any one more power or authority than another, but they are all equal. It is gathered into this society, merely by the authority of Christ, and when it is so collected, it hath neither right, privilege, rules nor bonds, as such, but what are prescribed and limited by the institutions and laws of Christ. And it continues on the same principles on which it was collected, namely the will of the members, subjected to the laws of Christ. This is as necessary to its present continuance in all its members, as it was in its first erection.

Now, in a society absolutely voluntary, and every way equal, there can be but three things necessary in order to constitute rule and office. The first is, That there be some among them that are fitted and qualified in a peculiar manner above others. This furnishing of some persons with meet qualifications for office in the church, the Lord hath taken on himself, and will accomplish it in all generations. Secondly, Since there is a new relation to be constituted, which was not before ; and seeing a bishop and a church, a pastor and flock, are relative names, one of which can have no existence without the other ; this relation must therefore be effected by the mutual voluntary acts of each party, namely by free choice, consent and approbation. Thirdly, It is required that persons thus chosen, be solemnly separated, dedicated to, and confirmed in their office, by fasting and prayer. This is prescribed to the church by special institutions. That there should be some kind of peculiar prayer in the dedication of any to the office of the ministry, is a notion that could never be eradicated from the minds of men, concerned in these things, nor abandoned in their practice. But there has been less regard paid to the other duty, namely, That these prayers should be accompanied with *fasting*, which also is necessary by virtue of apostolic example, Act xiv. 23.

To this is added an *external adjunct*, namely, *imposition of hands*, significant of the persons being so called to office in the church. Although it will, with difficulty, be proved, that the use of this ceremony was designed to continue, after a cessation of the communication of the extraordinary gifts and influences of the Holy Ghost, of which it was the sign and outward means, *in extraordinary officers*, nevertheless we do freely grant it to the ordinary officers of the church ; provided there be no apprehension of its being the sole authoritative conveyance of a successive flux of office-power, which is destructive of the whole nature of the institution.

The conduct of this work belonged unto extraordinary officers of the church whilst they were continued ; whose office having ceased, it devolves on those who are stated and ordinary. But where there are no officers, application should be made for the assistance of elders of other churches. Nay, it is necessary in virtue of the communion of churches, that in the choosing of



elders, the advice of other churches and elders ought not to be forgotten.

This is that order to which the rule of the scripture, the example of the first churches, and the nature of the things themselves, direct. Although I will not say, that a defect in any of these, especially if it arise from inevitable obstructions, renders a person's call to the pastoral office invalid; yet I must say, that where these are not all duly attended to, the institution of Christ is neglected, and the order of the church deranged.

Having proceeded thus far, it may be proper to give a solution to one or two queries, that arise with respect to the pastoral office.

1. *Whether a man may be ordained a pastor or minister without relation to any particular church, so as thereby to be invested with office-power?*

It is usually said that a man may be ordained a minister unto the catholic church, or to convert infidels, although he be not related to any particular flock or congregation. To this we answer, that no man can be properly or completely ordained to the ministry, but he that is ordained to a determinate office, as a bishop, elder, or pastor. This no man can be, but he who is ordained in and to a particular church. The other way, would be contrary to the constant practice of the apostles, who ordained no ordinary officers, but in particular churches, which were to be their proper charge, Acts xiv. 23. Tit. i. 5. Nor is there mention of any ordinary officers in the whole scripture, but such as were fixed in the particular churches to which they did relate, Acts xx. 28. Phil. i. 1. Rev. ii. 3. Afterwards we are informed of it being expressly forbidden, and all such ordinations declared null, and unfit to communicate any authority.

Such ordination wants the *essential cause* which constitutes office-power, namely, the election of the people, and must therefore be invalid. For to make a bishop or elder, (which are terms of relation) without any relation to a church or flock, is the same as to make a man a father who hath no child, which is impossible, and implies a contradiction.

We may add, that it is inconsistent with the whole *nature* and *end* of the pastoral office. They who thus set men apart charge them with *all the duties* of this office, and they who are set apart take upon them the discharge of the same: But how can they do either the one or the other, seeing they know not when or where these are to be performed? To prevent mistakes, however, its necessary to distinguish the setting men apart to office-power in the church from the following duty, which is very different.

---

*The setting apart and sending forth men to preach the gospel.*

The church, that is, the body or brotherhood, can set apart, by fasting and prayer a man to this work, who is endowed with *spiritual gifts* for this purpose, and when he may be orderly called to it in the providence of God. For, 1. Such a one hath a call to it *materially* in the *gifts* which he hath received, warranting him to the exercise of them, as he has occasion, to the edification of others, 1 Peter iv. 10, 11, "As every man " hath received the gift, even so minister the same," &c. 1 Cor. xiv. 12. "For as much as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts " seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."—Setting apart to an important work by prayer is a moral duty, and necessary in a peculiar manner in church affairs, Acts xiii. 2.—2. A *public testimony* and approbation is necessary to a man in his undertaking the work of preaching the gospel. This is proper on two account: For the sake of the communion of churches; that the person so set apart may be received in any of them as occasion requires. Of this sort were the letters of recommendation in the primitive church, 1 Cor. xvi. 3. 2 Cor. iii. 1. 3 John, verse 9. Also, in order to the safety of them among whom he may exercise his gifts, that they may not be imposed on by false teachers and seducers. The primitive church would not allow, nor is it allowable now in the communion of churches, for any person to undertake constantly to preach the gospel, who is not thus attested, warranted, and sent.\*

Men set apart and sent in this manner may be accounted ministers in the general sense of the word, and may be useful in the calling and planting of churches, in which afterwards they may be instituted in the pastoral office. In this case, the church does not communicate office authority. But where God gives gifts by his spirit, and a call by his providence, the church complies therewith, sends a person forth, and prays for a blessing on his work. The gifts and call are from God alone; and, by means of the church, he is thus sent to exercise them. This was originally the work of evangelists, which being an ex-

---

\* The idea of non-commissioned preachers of the gospel has no foundation in the word of God; for it is easy to see what confusion would ensue, were persons, in this respect, to be the judges of their own gifts. But that men are to be set apart for this purpose, is evident from the very nature of the thing, as well as from various passages of scripture, particularly Matth. xxviii. 19, 20. which is in force to the end of the world. Extraordinary commissions derived immediately from God and from the apostles have ceased. There is now but ONE way in which any person can be regularly authorized to preach, that is, by a particular church. This being a place for the mutual exercise of gifts, the brethren, from their own edification and connection in church-fellowship, are the best judges who are fit for this important work. That persons were originally sent in this manner we see from 1 Thes. i. 8. "From you founded out the word of the Lord;" and even Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Gentiles from the church at Antioch, Acts xiii. 2.

traordinary office, and accompanied with extraordinary authority, has ceased in the church.

*Quer.* 2. May a pastor remove from one congregation to another?

This is a thing, also, against which the ancient church (that is, after the apostles) made great provision. For when some churches were increased above others in members, reputation, privileges, and wealth, it became a frequent practice with the bishops, to design and endeavour their removal from a less to a greater benefice. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied, that there may be causes for the removal of a pastor from one congregation to another; for, the end of all particular churches being to promote the edification of the catholic church in general, where, in a peculiar manner, such a removal contributes to this end, it appears right to allow it. Cases of this nature may arise from the consideration of persons, places, times, and many other circumstances that I cannot particularly insist on.

But that such removals may be without offence, it is necessary that they take place with the free consent of the churches concerned, and with the advice of other churches, or other elders, with whom they walk in communion. Of this sort of removals, in this orderly way, there are many examples in the primitive times.

## THE DUTY OF PASTORS OF CHURCHES.

1. The first and principle duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligently preaching the word. It is a promise relating to the New Testament, that God would “give to his church pastors according to his own heart, who should feed them with “knowledge and understanding,” Jer. iii. 15. This feeding essentially belongs to the office of a pastor, so that he who doth not or cannot feed the flock, notwithstanding an outward call, is no pastor. The care of preaching the gospel was committed to Peter, and in him to all true pastors of the church, under the name of *feeding*, John xxi. 15, 16.

Several things are required to the work of pastoral preaching; as, 1. Spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel; that they may declare unto the church the whole counsel of God, and the unfathomable riches of Christ; see Acts xx. 27. 1 Cor. ii. 4—7. Ephes. iii. 8—11. The generality of the church, especially those who are grown in knowledge and experience, have a spiritual insight in these things, and which the apostle prays that all believers may have, Ephes. i. 17—19; so that if those that instruct them have not some degree of eminence herein, they cannot be useful in leading them on to perfection. The little care that has been taken about this, has rendered the ministry of many in our days, useless and fruitless.

2. Experience of the power of the truth in their own souls. Without this, they will be lifeless and heartless in their work,

and their labour for the most part unprofitable towards others. This will be the case, if the love of lucre, or ostentation and reputation, are the motives that induce persons to take upon them this office. A man only preacheth that sermon well to others, who preacheth it well to his own soul. If the word does not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us. No man lives in a more woful condition than those who really believe not themselves what they are continually teaching others to believe. 3. Skill to divide the word aright, 2 Tim. ii. 15. And this consists in a practical wisdom, arising from strict attention to the word of truth, in order to find what is real, substantial, and necessary for the souls of the hearers, to give to all sorts of persons in the church that which is their proper portion. This requires, 4. A prudent and careful attendance to the state of the flock over which any man is set, as to their strength or weakness, their growth or defect in knowledge. Without due attention to these things, which require either milk or strong meat, men preach at random, fighting like those that beat the air. Preaching sermons not designed for the advantage of them to whom they are preached, and insisting on general doctrines, not adapted to the condition of the audience, will make men weary of preaching, as well as make others weary in hearing them. 5. To all these is to be joined a fervent zeal for the glory of God, and compassion for the souls of men; where these are not in vigorous exercise, in the minds and souls of them that preach the word, giving a demonstration of themselves to the consciences of the hearers, the quickening power, the life and soul of preaching is lost.

With preaching is also connected the preserving the truth, or doctrine of the gospel, received and professed in the church, and the defence of it against all opposition. This is committed in a peculiar manner to the pastors of the churches, as the apostle frequently and emphatically repeats the charge to Timothy, and in him to all who have the dispensation of the word committed to them, 1 Tim. i. 1--4. Chap. iv. 6, 7, 16. What he says of himself, that the glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed unto his trust, 1 Tim. i. 11. is true of all pastors of churches, according to their measure and call; and they should aim at the account which he gives of his ministry—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," 2 Tim. iii. 7. The sinful neglect of this duty in pastors has been the cause of most pernicious heresies and errors that have infested and ruined the church. Those whose duty it was to preserve *the faith once delivered to the saints* entire in the public profession of it, bishops, presbyters, and public teachers have many of them *spoken perverse things to draw away the disciples after them*, and been the ringleaders in heresies. Therefore, this duty, at this time, demands particular attention, when the fundamental truths of the gospel are attacked by all sorts of adversaries.



Several things are needful to the discharge of this duty ; as,  
 1. A clear, sound, comprehensive knowledge of the doctrine of the gospel. This is especially attained by diligent study of the scripture, with fervent prayer for illumination and understanding. Men cannot preserve that for others of which they are ignorant themselves. Truth may be lost by weakness, as well as by wickedness. 2. *Love of the truth*, which they have so learned and comprehended. Unless we look on truth as a pearl, as that which is to be bought with any price, as that which is better than the whole world, we will not endeavour its preservation with that diligence which is required. If ministers have not a sense of the power of the truth in their own souls, and a taste of its goodness, we need not expect that they will be valiant for it.

2. The second duty of a pastor towards his flock is continual fervent *prayer* for them ; " Give yourselves to the word and " prayer." Without this, no man can preach to them as he ought, nor perform any other duty of the pastoral office. From this, a man may form the best estimate of the discharge of his duty. He that doth constantly, diligently and fervently pray for his flock, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity in the discharge of all other pastoral duties ; nor can he voluntarily omit any of them. As to those who are negligent in this, be their pains and labour in other duties ever so great, they give no evidence of sincerity in the discharge of their office. In this constant prayer for the church, respect must be had to the success of the word in all the blessed ends of it ; the temptations to which the church is generally exposed ; the peculiar state and condition of all the members, so far as is known ; the presence of Christ by his Spirit in the assemblies of the church, with all the blessed evidences of it, without which all are only mere forms ; their perseverance in faith, love and fruitfulness, with all the duties that belong to them.

It is much to be desired, that all those who take upon them the pastoral office would well consider how great and necessary a part of their work consists in continual fervent prayer for their flocks : For, besides its being the only instituted way in which, by virtue of their office, they may bless their congregations, they will also, in the discharge of it, find their hearts and minds more and more filled with love, and stirred up to diligence in all the other duties of their office, and excited, on every opportunity, to the exercise of all grace towards the whole church. But where any are negligent in this respect, every other duty must be influenced by false motives, and therefore will be found wanting in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. The administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper is committed unto them as the stewards of the house of Christ. And here it is their duty to keep most minutely to the institution of Christ, with regard to the manner of their ministrations. The gradual introduction of uninstituted rites and observances into the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, ended in the idolatry

of the mass. The glory and beauty of these administrations, consists only in their being expressive of the institution, and in direct obedience to the authority of Christ, to which nothing is to be superadded. In this case, says the apostle, "I have received of the LORD that which also I delivered unto you." 1 Cor. xi. 23. It is also their duty to take care that these holy things be administered only to those who are meet and worthy, according to the rule of the gospel.—Here the following observations may not be unnecessary.

That it is only a particular church, as organized, that can attain the regular administration of all gospel ordinances.

That though all gospel ordinances belong to a particular church, yet they are not all confined to it, as their sole object. For instance—

The preaching of the word has, for its first object, the world for conversion; and *2dly*, professors for edification. Baptism has not, for its only object, either the world or the members of a particular church, but professors, with those that are reckoned to them by God's appointment, that is, there infant feed. The Supper is confined to a particular church, as is acknowledged, and may be proved from the institution; and from one great end of it, communion, and the necessity of discipline, thereon depending.

4. It belongs to the office of a pastor to labour diligently for the conversion of souls to God. The ordinary means of conversion are left unto the church, and its duty is to attend unto it. Yea one of the principal ends of the institution and preservation of churches, is the conversion of souls; and when there are no more to be converted there shall no longer be a church on the earth. To enlarge the kingdom of Christ, to diffuse the light and favour of the gospel, to be subservient to the calling of the elect, or gathering all the sheep of Christ into his fold, are what God designs by his churches in this world. The preaching of the word is committed principally, though not exclusively, to the pastors of the churches. The work of the apostles and evangelists had this for its order: 1. They were to make disciples of men by preaching the gospel in order to conversion. This was their principal work, as Paul testifieth, 1 Cor. i. 17. and in this they were gloriously instrumental in laying the foundation of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, all over the world. The second part of their work was to teach them that were converted; and thus they gathered the disciples of Christ into churches, under ordinary officers. Now, although the first ordinary work of these officers differs thus from that of those who were extraordinary, namely, that it is to teach all the disciples of Christ to observe all things that he hath commanded; yet this does not free them from an interest in the other part of the work, in preaching the word for the conversion of sinners. They are not bound (indeed their situation precludes them from it) to follow the way of the apostles and evangelists,

but in many cases, the edification of any particular church is to give way to the glory of Christ in calling the members of the church catholic. Wherever the pastors go, although they be officers of a particular church, they are there the ministers of Christ. We do not consider the pastoral office to be such, as a man must leave it behind him, every time he goes from home, so as not to preach when he sees an opportunity; or that it is in his own power, or in the power of any, to divest him of it, unless he be dismissed or deposed from it by the authority of Christ in his word. Yea, of such importance is the preaching of the gospel, for the conversion of sinners, that when there are opportunities and calls in providence to this purpose, the harvest great and labourers few, it is lawful, nay, it is the duty of pastors, to leave constant attendance on their pastoral charge, at least for a season, and apply themselves to the more public preaching of the word. To this no particular church will be reluctant, which understands that even the whole end of particular churches is but the edification of the church catholic; and that their individual good is to give way to the glory of Christ in the whole. "The good shepherd will leave the ninety and nine" sheep, to seek after one that wanders; and we may certainly leave a few for a season, when called to it by divine providence, to seek after a great multitude of wanderers.

5. It is incumbent on these entrusted with the pastoral office, to be ready, willing, and able to comfort, relieve, and refresh those who are tempted and dejected, from fears and grounds of disconsolation in times of trial and desertion. "The tongue of the learned" is required in them, that they should know how "to speak a word in season to him that is weary." One eminent qualification of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office in heaven, is, that he is "touched with a fellow feeling of our infirmities, and knows how to succour them that are tempted." His whole flock in this world are a company of tempted ones. His own life in this world he calls the time of his temptation.

Among his flock there are always some who, in a peculiar manner, are under darkness and disconsolations; some at their conversion, whilst under a deep sense of the terror of the Lord, the sharpness of conviction, and the uncertainty of their condition; some relapsed into sin, or omissions of duty; some under great and lasting afflictions, and the like.—It belongs to the office of pastors rightly to understand the various cases that will occur of this kind, from such principles of truth and experience, as may be prudently applied to their relief. This will not be attained by a collection and determination of cases of conscience in books, by which some have both debauched their own consciences, as well as those of others, to the dishonour and ruin of religion, as far as their influence has extended; although they may be of use when prudently used. But the proper way of attaining this knowledge is by diligent study of



the scriptures, meditation thereon, with fervent prayer; experience in the nature of the work of the Spirit of God in the souls of men; of the conflict that is between the flesh and the spirit, &c. Without these, all pretences to this duty of the pastoral office are vain; hence it is despised by some, and the whole of it much neglected in general.

To discourage any from seeking relief in perplexities of this nature, or to behave towards them with seeming aversion or indifference, is "*to turn that which is lame out of the way,*" and not at all to express the care of Christ towards his flock, Isa. xl. 11. Pastors ought to bear patiently and tenderly with the weakness, ignorance, slowness of conviction, yea perhaps impertinences of the people in the situations of which we speak. These things will abound, partly from their natural infirmities, many being weak, and perhaps froward too; and especially from the present state of their minds, tending to make them jealous of every thing in which they are spiritually concerned.

To the duty now insisted on, we add the following, with which it is connected; namely, a compassionate suffering with all the members of the church in all their trials and troubles, whether internal or external, with attention to the poor and visitation of the sick, which are commonly neglected. Pastors resemble Jesus Christ, which is the chief design of their office. A view by faith of the glory of Christ in his compassion to his suffering members, is the principle spring of consolation to the church in all its distresses; and the same spirit, the same mind, in this respect, ought, according to their measure, to dwell in all to whom the pastoral office is committed. Thus the apostle expresseth in himself: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?" 2 Cor. ii. 29. Unless this compassion and goodness run through the whole discharge of their office, men cannot be said to be evangelical shepherds, nor the sheep in any sense to be their own. For those to pretend to the pastoral office who live, perhaps, in wealth and pleasure, regardless of the sufferings and temptations of their flock, or the poor of it; or who stand related to such churches as where it is impossible they can so much as be acquainted with the greatest part of them,\*—is neither consistent with the institution of their office, nor the design of Christ therein.

---

\* In a multitude of places where the above observation is verified, (take Edinburgh for an example,) there are many congregations so large that the ministers can neither distinctly know the people, nor the people one another; and far less can they be expected to perform the duties of brethren. The great end of a church is edification, with which the number of its members ought to be consistent. There is indeed a very common, but a very false method of forming an estimate of the FLOURISHING STATE of congregations, viz. by the greatness of their numbers, and the strength of their funds! Upon very different evidences of prosperity did the apostle of the Gentiles rejoice when writing to the Church at Colosse: "Rejoicing" and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."



6. There is a communion to be observed among all the churches of the same faith and profession in any nation. The principal care of this, in order to the edification of the churches, devolves on the pastors, whether it be exercised by letters of mutual advice, congratulation, consolation, or in attestation of communion, &c.

7. I shall conclude these few instances of the pastoral care and duty with *that* without which all the rest will neither be profitable to men nor acceptable to the great Shepherd, that is, an *humble, holy, exemplary conversation in all godliness and honesty*. The rules and precepts of the scripture, the example of Christ and his apostles, with that of the bishops or pastors of the primitive churches, the nature of the thing itself, and the religion we profess, do all incontrovertably prove this practice necessary and indispensable in a gospel ministry. It is evident to demonstration that the ruin of the Christian religion in most nations where it hath been professed, and of the nations themselves, has proceeded from the ambition, pride, luxury, uncleanness, profaneness, and in other respect, vitious conversation of those who have been called the Clergy. And in daily observation, it is as clear as if written with the beams of the sun, that whatever else takes place in churches, if their pastors, or those who are accounted such, be not examples of gospel obedience and holiness, there will be no progress or improvement in religion among the people. If persons, gaudy and indecent in their apparel, habit, and behaviour, corrupt in their communication, barren and unfavourable with respect to spiritual conference; if such as are covetous, oppressive, and contentious; such as are negligent in holy duties in their own families, and so cannot stir up others to diligence in these; much more, if such as are openly sensual, vitious and depraved, are admitted into this office, we may take our leave of all the glory and power of religion among the people committed to their charge.

To do justice to the pastoral office, it would be proper distinctly to explain all the qualifications previously necessary in bishops or elders in order to their call to this office, as declared by the apostle, 1 Tim. iii. 2—7. 2 Tit. ii. 9. The foregoing are some of the *duties* incumbent on pastors, and afford us the following reflections.

1. That a view of these as proposed in the scripture, is enough to make the wisest and best of men, and most diligent in the pastoral office, to cry out with the apostle, *Who is sufficient for these things?* Although no sense of insufficiency can utterly discourage any in the undertaking of a work to which he is assured the Lord Christ calls him; for where he calls to a duty, he gives necessary strength for the performance of it. When we, under a deep sense of our own weakness, say “Who is sufficient for these things?” He says, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

2. That although the things mentioned do undeniably belong to the discharge of the pastoral office, yet they are very little considered by the most that seek after it. The present ruin of religion in all places ariseth principally from this cause, that multitudes of those who undertake this office, are neither in any measure fit for, nor do conscientiously perform the duties of it. It ever was and ever will be true in general, *like minister like people*.

3. That notwithstanding of the account that is to be given of the discharge of this office to Jesus Christ at the last day, the consideration of which had a mighty influence on the apostles themselves; yet, it is manifest, there are few on whose minds even this makes any due impression. On that day, however, with respect to the pastoral office, our Saviour will proceed upon such articles as we have mentioned, and others contained in the scripture, and not at all on certain *forms* which now occupy their place.

4. That it is not in the power of any church really to confer the pastoral office on any who are evidently destitute of the previous qualifications that the scripture requireth in those who are called to it.

5. Where such persons are by any means placed as pastors in churches, they are stumbling blocks to the people; and it is the duty of every one who knows the importance of his own edification and salvation, to withdraw from such churches, and to join himself to another, where edification is to be obtained. For since this is the sole end of churches, their offices, officers, and administrations, it is the highest folly to imagine that any disciple of Christ is obliged by his authority to abide in the communion of such churches, without seeking relief in the way that he hath appointed. Indeed where the generality of churches, in any kind of association, are headed by pastors defective in these qualifications, there all public reformation is morally impossible; and it therefore becomes the duty of *private men* to attend to the welfare of their own souls, let persons and churches say what they please.

6. All churches would do well to consider the weight and burden that lie upon their pastors in the discharge of their office, that they may be constant in fervent prayers and supplications for them; and also to provide as much as possible against their being embarrassed with trouble and cares about the things of this life.

---

The above are the sentiments of our author.—We may add,—  
[When pastors are without any other means of support, we know it is the duty of the church, as far as they are able, to minister to them of the things of this life. But it is also equally evident, that pursuing a lawful calling is perfectly consistent with their office, and that it is their duty to attend to the same, according as circumstances require. The following passage in-

dubitably confirms this point, Acts xx. 17. " And from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." The elders having come, he concludes a solemn charge to them with these remarkable words, verses 33—36: " I have coveted no mans silver, or gold, or apparel: Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so LABOURING, ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE." Without considerable portion of this spirit, primitive Christianity will not be revived.]

## OF DEACONS.

The original institution, nature, and use of the office of deacons in the church, are so well known as to render it unnecessary to say much upon it. The remote foundation of it lies in these words of our Saviour, " The poor you have always with you," John xii. 8. He doth not only foretel that such there should be in the church, but recommends the care of them to the church. For he maketh use of the words of the law, Deut. xv. 11. " For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore, I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thy hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy." This legal institution, founded also in the law of nature, the Lord Christ transfers and introduces among his disciples, for the use of the gospel churches.

And it may be observed, that at the very time when provision was made for the poor, hypocrisy and avarice began to avail themselves of this advantage, which afterwards they effectually turned to their own purpose: For on this pretence, Judas immediately condemned an eminent duty towards the person of Christ, as containing an expence, which might have been better laid out in provision for the poor. The ointment poured on our Saviour he thought might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor; " But this he said not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag," out of which he could have made excellent booty to himself, John xii. 6. It also appears, that although Judas impiously began this murmuring, yet at last some of the other disciples listened too much to his insinuation, for the other evangelists ascribe it to them also. The same pretence, on the same grounds, was turned to the greatest advantage of covetousness that ever was in the world: For professing to provide for the poor, " the thieves who had got the bag," that is, the ruling part of the clergy, allowed men in the neglect of the greatest and most important duties of religion towards Christ himself, if they would only give all that they had to the poor; not that they cared for the poor, but because they were thieves, and had



the bag. And by these means they possessed themselves of the greatest part of the wealth of the nations professing the Christian religion.

The *use* of this office is farther evident by the preaching of *the gospel among the poor*. Many of those who first recieved it were of this description, as the scripture every where testifieth: "The poor are evangelized," Matth. ii. 5. "God hath chosen the poor," Jam. ii. 5; and therefore provision for them was one of the most eminent duties of the church in those days. By this ~~it~~ was made manifest, that the doctrine and profession of the gospel was not a matter of worldly design or advantage; God also thereby declared of how little esteem with him the riches of the world are. Provision was also thereby made for the exercise of the bounty of the rich in their liberality, the only way in which they can glorify God with their substance. And it were well if all churches, and all the members of them, would wisely consider how eminent a grace, how excellent a duty it is to make provision for the poor, and how much the glory of Christ and the honour of the gospel are concerned in it. And altho' by the most part it is only considered as an ordinary work, to be performed transiently, and scarce deserving any of the time which is devoted to the public service and duties of churches, it is indeed one of the most eminent duties of Christian societies, in which the principal exercise of the second evangelical grace consists, namely love.

The care of making provision for the poor being an institution in the church of Christ, it naturally devolved on them who were the first officers of the church, that, is the apostles. This is plain from the occasion of the institution of the office of deacons, Acts vi. The whole work and care of the church being in their hands, it was impossible that they could attend unto all the parts of it fully. Now as they attended chiefly to those parts of their work which were far more excellent and necessary than the other, viz, *the word and prayer*, there was such a defect in this other part, viz. ministration to the poor, as must unavoidably attend the actions of limited human nature. Very soon, those that were concerned, expressed their complaint, and that in a way somewhat improper, *there was a murmuring about it*, ver. i.

Upon this the apostles, by the authority of Christ and direction of the Holy Spirit, under whose infallible guidance they were in all the general concerns of the church, instituted the office of deacons, for the discharge of this necessary and important duty, which they could not attend to themselves. The Lord Christ, in a special manner had committed the care of the poor unto the disciples; and now here was a declaration of his mind and will in what way and by what means he would have them provided for. Therefore we observe,—

That this was not a *temporary* institution confined to that season, nor were the officers so appointed, extraordinary, but



were to abide in the church through all generations: For 1. The work itself, as a particular part of ministry in the church, was never to cease; "The poor you shall have always with you." 2. The reason of its institution is perpetual, namely, that the pastors of the churches are not sufficient in themselves to the whole work of praying, preaching, and this ministration. 3. Deacons are afterward, not only in this church at Jerusalem, but in all the Gentiles churches, reckoned among the fixed officers of the church, Phil. i. 1. 4. Direction is given for their continuation in all churches, with a prescription of the qualifications of the persons to be chosen into this office, 1 Tim. iii. 8, 10, 11. 5. The way of their call is directed, and an office committed unto them: "Let them first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon." 6. The promise of acceptance is annexed to the diligent discharge of this office, ver. 13.

The qualifications of persons to be called to this office are distinctly laid down by the apostle, 1 Tim. iii. 8—13. Upon the trial and approbation of them with respect to these qualifications; their call to this office consists, 1. in the choice of the church; 2. in a separation unto it by prayer, Acts vi. 3, 5, 6.

The things necessary in their ministration are these: 1. *Mercy*, to represent the tenderness of Christ towards the poor of the flock, Rom. xii. 8. 2. *Cheerfulness*, to relieve the spirits of them that receive the charity of the church from the thoughts of being troublesome and burdensome to others. 3. *Diligence* and faithfulness, by which they "purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

That maintenance of the poor which they are to distribute, is to be collected by the voluntary contributions of the church, which are ordinarily to be made every first day of the week (and in an extraordinary manner, as occasion shall require,) 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. And this contribution of the church ought to be,—in a way of *bounty*, not sparingly, 2 Cor. ix. 5—7.—In a way of *equality*, as to mens abilities, 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14.—With respect to *present successes* and prosperity, as God hath prospered him, 1 Cor. xvi. 2.—With willingness and freedom, 2 Cor. viii. 12. Therefore it belongs to the deacons in the discharge of their office, to acquaint the church with the present necessity of the poor; to stir up the particular members of it to a free contribution according to their ability; to admonish those that are negligent, who give not according to their proportion; and to acquaint the elders of the church with those who persist in a neglect of this duty.

The inspection of the state of the poor, to whom the contributions of the church are to be ministered, belongs to the discharge of this office.—As, 1. that they are *poor indeed*, and do not pretend to be so for the sake of advantage. 2. What are

the degrees of their poverty, with respect to their relations and circumstances, that they may have suitable supplies. 3. That in other things they walk according to rule. 4. In particular, that they work and labour according to their ability ; for he that will not labour must not eat at the public charge. 5. To comfort, counsel and exhort them to patience, submission, contentment and thankfulness with respect to their condition. All which are so obvious as not to require any further illustration.

We may also add the following observations.

That the office of deacon is an office of service, and gives no superior authority or power in the rule of the church ; but as it is an office, it gives authority with respect to the peculiar object of it, that is, it gives a right to attend to it in a peculiar manner, and to perform the duties of it, which are solely of a temporal nature, serving the tables of the church, and the tables of the poor.

The reason of the institution of this office being in general to free the pastors of the churches who labour in word and doctrine, from the external avocations in which the church is concerned, it belongs therefore to the deacons, not only to take care of and provide for the poor, but to manage all other affairs of the church of the same kind ; such as providing for the place of the church-assemblies, elements for the Lord's Supper, the collecting, keeping, and disposing of the stock of the church, for the maintenance of its officers, and other necessary expenditures.

The elders are not so exempted from all care about this office as not to interfere in its affairs ; for it is the duty of the deacons to acquaint them from time to time with the state of the church, especially of the poor, and on all important concerns to ask and receive counsel and directions from them. In the case of extraordinary collections from or for other churches, they are to be made and disposed by the elders, Acts ii. 30.

The members of the church are not, in virtue of the exercise of the office of deacons, exempted from the discharge of its duties ; for their office and work is to excite, direct, and help them in the exercise of this grace, and the discharge of these incumbent duties. No man, by intrusting a due proportion of his substance in the hands of deacons for its distribution, can be absolved from discharging the duties of love, charity, bounty, and benevolence, which are required by the law of nature, and receive peculiar obligations under the gospel ; and are therefore to be performed by the disciples of Christ, as opportunities in providence offer.

## CHAP. XI.

## OF EXCOMMUNICATION.

THE power of the church towards its members (for it has nothing to do with them that are without) may be reduced to three heads: The admission of members into its society; the rule and edification of them that belong unto it; and the exclusion of such as obstinately refuse to live and walk according to the laws and rules thereof. The two first of these have already been discussed. We now proceed to the last, viz. the power of *Excommunication*.

Although there is nothing more plain and obvious to the common understanding of all Christians, yea of all mankind, than this institution of Christ, both as to its nature, and manner of administration; nothing more salutary to the souls of men; nothing in which there is the least tendency to cause disturbance to civil society, or to interfere with the political rights of any individual in the world; yet it hath been transformed into a hideous monster, an engine of priestly domination and tyranny, no less pernicious to the Christian world than those dreadful scourges of mankind, the Saracens and the Turks.

The most effectual way to disprove all corruptions in the practicals of religion, as Baptism, the Lord's Supper, public worship, government and the like, is to state the things themselves as appointed by Christ, and recorded in the scriptures in their original simplicity and purity. A real view of them in this light, will divest the minds of men (not corrupted and hardened by prejudice and interest) of those erroneous conceptions with which they have been prepossessed. This I shall attempt with regard to excommunication.

The power of churches, as to the exclusion of persons out of their society, extends only to the benefits and advantages which the society as such doth afford and communicate. Now, if churches be an institution of him whose kingdom is not of this world, these privileges must be only spiritual. The power of churches cannot extend itself to any outward concerns of men, as to their lives, liberties, natural or political privileges, &c.; unless we shall say, that men hold these things in virtue of their relation to the church, which would overthrow all natural rights in the world.

Every society hath this power towards those only who are incorporated in it by their own consent. From whence could they have, or who could give such a power towards others? The apostle's rule exactly applies here, "*What have we to do to judge them that are without?*" It would be ridiculous in any

corporation to pretend to disfranchise such as never were members of it.

The only reason for the exclusion of any person out of a society, is a wilful deviation from the rules and laws of the society, which he had promised to observe at his admission. If the grand rule of every church-society be, that men observe and do whatever Christ hath commanded, none can be justly cast out of that society, but upon a wilful disobedience to his commands.—Therefore the casting of men out of church communion on light and trivial occasions, is contrary to natural light, and the nature of the things themselves.

I say, every lawful confederate society is warranted by the light of nature to remove from its communion, and from a participating of its rights and privileges, any of its number who will not walk according to the rules and principles of its constitution. And since the rule of the constitution of the church is, that men walk together in holy obedience according to the commandments of Christ, and the observance of all his institutions, without giving offence, by any sinful miscarriage, to one another or to those that are without; if any one do wilfully and obstinately transgress in any of these things, it is the right and duty, and is in the power of the church to remove him from its society.

The church is different in its nature from other societies. The general principles of natural equity cannot be extended to things spiritual and supernatural; nor will the actings of men upon such, reach the consciences of others for the proper ends of excommunication. Therefore it was necessary that it should have a peculiar institution in the church, by the authority of Jesus Christ: "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" 1 Cor. v. 4. There is such an efficacy assigned to excommunication, in binding the consciences of men, in retaining their sins, in the destruction or mortification of the flesh, in the healing and recovery of sinners, as nothing but the authority of a divine institution can give it.

That excommunication is an express ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ in his churches is fully declared in the scripture. The power of it is contained in the authority given by Christ to the church, under the name of *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. The power here expressed is not merely doctrinal and declarative, as the preaching of the gospel is, but it is disciplinary also, as it is appropriated to the house, the keys of which (as far as office requires) are committed to the stewards. It was the design of Christ to have his church holy, unblameable, and without offence in the world, that he might thus give a representation of his own holiness, and the holiness of his government. But seeing those of whom it is constituted are liable to fall into sins scandalous and offensive, and so reflect dishonour on him and the church, as well as give occasion of sinning to others, that design would not be accomplished, had he not given authority for separating offenders. Neglect of the proper exercise of this au-



thority is the principle means whereby the glory, honour, and usefulness of churches have been utterly lost.

This ordinance hath a direct institution in Matth. xviii. 15—20. “ Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: And whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” &c. After all the learned and unlearned contests about the meaning of this place, the sense of it is plain and obvious to those whose minds are not clouded with prejudices about such churches and such excommunications as are entirely foreign to the scripture. It hath been proved before, that by *trespasses* in the above passage is intended *sins* against God, occasioning scandal and offence; and also that the church here mentioned is a particular congregation. To this church belongs the cognizance of the scandalous offences of its members, when brought before it in the order described in the above passage. Hereon it makes a determination in the first place, designing the recovery of the person offending by administering its counsel and advice; but in case of obstinacy, the church is to remove him from its communion, leaving him in the outward condition of a heathen and a publican. Thus is he to be esteemed by them that were offended with his sin, and that because of the authority of the church binding him in heaven and earth unto the punishment due to his sins, except he repent. So that the excommunication we plead for (the power of which is plainly here granted by Christ, and ordained in the church) is the cutting off an offending brother from the society of the church, leaving him, as to all the *privileges of the church*, in the state of a heathen, declaring him liable to the displeasure of Christ and everlasting punishment, without repentance.

The practice of the apostles corresponded with this institution. The direction given by the apostle Paul, with respect to the incestuous person, is express to the purpose, 1 Cor. v. 1—7. He first declares the sin with which the person was charged, and the scandal attending it, ver. 1: He next blames the church for not being so affected with the guilt and scandal thereof, as to have proceeded to separate him from their society, ver. 2: He then declares his own judgment in the case, ver. 3. Having done so, he mentions the authority for their procedure. “ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with his power.”—He also takes notice of the instrumentality of the church in this deed; do it “ when ye are gathered together,” ver. 4; and thereby “ purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new

"lump," ver. 7; hence the sentence is said to be *inflicted by many*, 2 Cor. ii. 6. that is, by all those who, upon his repentance, were obliged to forgive and comfort him, that is, the WHOLE CHURCH, ver. 7. The nature of the sentence is, "the delivering of such an one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," ver. 5.

It is frequently objected, that this was an extraordinary act of the apostolic power; that the man was delivered unto Satan that he might be afflicted, terrified in mind, and punished in his body, to the destruction of the flesh, that is, unto death, which is not applicable to churches in our times.

To this we answer, Whatever the apostles did in any church, whether present or absent, by their own authority, did not infringe upon the right of the churches themselves. The case before us is an instance of this; for the church itself is charged with its duty, and directed to exercise its authority in cutting off the offenders. As to the other part of the objection, about the *delivery unto Satan*, it is evident there was no such thing intended as is here supposed. The design and end of it, as is expressly affirmed in the text, was the man's humiliation, recovery, and salvation; and this effect it really had, for the man was healed and restored.

This delivery unto Satan is no more but the casting out of the visible kingdom of Christ, giving him up, as to his external condition, into the state of the heathens and publicans, who belonged unto the kingdom of Satan. The gathering of men by conversion into the church, is the "turning of them from the power of Satan unto God," Acts xxvi. 18; *a delivery from the power of darkness*, that is, the kingdom of Satan, and a translation into the kingdom of Christ, Col. i. 13; therefore, when a man, by the authority of Christ, is visibly excluded from a participation of all the privileges of the gospel, as having neither right nor interest in them, he is delivered again into the visible kingdom of Satan; which is all that is here intended.

The above case therefore is a standing rule for the church in all ages, and contains all that we plead for, with respect to this ordinance, viz. The cause of excommunication, which is a scandalous sin unrepented of—The preparation for its execution, that is, the church's sense of the sin and scandal, with humiliation for it—The warrant for it, the institution of Christ—The manner and form of it, by an act of authority, with the consent of the whole church—The effect of it, a total separation from the privileges of the church—The ends of it, the purity and vindication of the church; and the repentance, reformation and salvation of the person excommunicated.

The duty of the church respecting this ordinance is pointed out in many other places of scripture.

The apostle commends the church of Corinth for what they had done in the excommunication of the incestuous person, 2 Cor. ii. 6—8; calling it a punishment inflicted on him *by ma-*

ny. He also mentions the effect of this sentence upon him, his humiliation and repentance; and then directs to his restoration, by an act of the church forgiving him, and confirming their love unto him. In 2 Thes. iii. 6. he says, Now we command you, "brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." What it is to walk disorderly he declares immediately, namely, to live in an open disobedience to any of the commands of Christ. "not after the tradition which ye received of us," that is, the doctrine of the gospel, which he had delivered to them. See to the same purpose, Tit. iii. 10, 11. 1 Tim. v. 20. Rev. ii. 2, 14, 15. 20, 21.

There have been many disputes about this institution, as to its order and kinds. Some suppose there are *two sorts* of excommunication, the one they call the *lesser*, and the other the *greater*. The scripture makes no mention of any sort but one, and is as silent about any degrees therein. A separation from all communion in church order, worship and privileges, is the *only* excommunication that the scripture knows any thing about.

*Men* may indulge strange notions of excommunication with respect to its power, its effects, &c. But in the New Testament, we have the mind of Christ concerning this ordinance very clearly set before us, which is, that he hath given full power unto his church, and enforces it as a duty, to exclude obstinate offenders from their communion, and to restore them again upon their repentance.

Both elders and private members have each their peculiar part in the observance of this ordinance. With respect to the elders, we may observe, that since the care of the church in the preservation of its purity, the vindication of its honour, the edification of all its members, and the correction and salvation of offenders, is principally incumbent on them, they are (or at least should be) best able to judge when and for what this sentence ought to be denounced. Here indeed their spiritual skill is much required. The not exercising of this power is charged as a culpable neglect on the angels or presidents of the churches, and they are also commended for the due exercise thereof.

Nevertheless the power of the whole church, or the brotherhood, is indispensibly necessary here; for wherever the apostle treats this subject, he never recommends it in any particular manner to the officers of the church, but to the *whole church* in general. This is evident from the places before quoted. It is highly reasonable it should be so; for the whole church is concerned both in point of duty and interest. In point of *duty*; for, in virtue of the mutual watch of all the members of the church over each other, and of the care incumbent on every one of them, for the good and edification of the whole, it is their duty jointly and individually to endeavour the purging out from among them every thing contrary to these ends. And they who are not concerned in these things are dead, useless members of the



church.—They are also concerned in point of *interest*; they are “*to look diligently lest any root of bitterness springing up should trouble them, and many be defiled.*” Heb. xii. 15, It is usually said that the good are not defiled by holding communion with the wicked in the holy ordinances of the gospel of Christ; and there is without doubt some truth in the assertion, as far as it respects undiscovered hypocrites. But to make church members believe they are no way concerned in the scandalous lives of those with whom they hold fellowship, and thus openly avow themselves members of the same body, is an engine of the devil, invented to countenance churches in dreadful security, and is the cause of their ruin. Therefore, they are also obliged, in point of spiritual interest, as they are careful about their own souls, to concur in the separation of obstinate offenders. Thus it is evident the practice of this institution, is committed unto and resides in the body of the church. According as they concur, or otherwise, the sentence is executed or suspended. Excommunication without the consent of the church, is, MERE NOTHING.

I shall still add a few observations.

1. It is extremely evident from the afore said case of the church of Corinth, that the *whole church* is expressly charged with sin and guilt, because they had neglected their duty in not putting away the incestuous person. This sin could not have been chargeable on them, were it really so that the whole power in this matter is lodged in the hands of a few officers, and the church have no right to act in it. None can incur guilt merely by others not discharging their duty. And if it be a duty thus so strongly enforced on the brethren, how strange is it to suppose they have not power to perform it!

2. The church, *essentially* considered, is *before* the ordinary officers; for the apostles ordained *officers in every church*; and the church in that state has power to put away an obstinate offender. Also, in the fully-organized state of the church, commands are given to the brotherhood for that purpose, as is plain from the passage already quoted. Yea, the very infliction of the sentence is ascribed to them, 2 Cor. ii. 5.

With respect to the *objects* of this church censure, and the *nature of the sin* for which it is to be inflicted, we may observe,

1. That excommunication primarily had respect to things *holy, just, and good*, or the performance of such gospel duties as men owed to Christ, and their own souls, therefore the observance of it was plain and easy from scripture rules. But when it came to be applied to certain pretended irregularities which have a reference merely to the laws and constitutions of men, and things trifling and indifferent in their own nature, there was a necessity for leaving the scriptures, and having it conducted by such court processes, &c. as render it doubtful whether their procedure ought more to be ridiculed or lamented.

2. The objects of it must be members of that church by which the sentence is passed. One church cannot excommunicate the



members of another. That sentence signifies nothing, which is pronounced by officers who are not members of that particular church where the sin is committed.

3. These church members to be cut off are such as continue obdurate in the practice of any sin prejudicial to the edification of the church after private and public admonition. The process in ordinary cases is so clearly stated, Matt. xviii. as to render any further account of it unnecessary.

In order to form a right judgment of the *sin* that subjects to this sentence, let it be observed, 1. That it must be such as is allowed by all, without doubtful disputation, to be condemned by the light of nature, or by the express testimony of scripture. If it be not thus evident, it is not fit for the determination of the *body of the church*, and will issue in strifes, divisions, and a party spirit, which only profane this divine institution.

2. It is necessary that the fact, with regard to the particular offender, be either *confessed* or *clearly proved*; and that the previous process by private and public admonition be repeatedly and patiently observed, in the spirit of meekness and love.

As to the *manner* of its administration, the following things are required.

1. *Prayer*, without which it cannot be administered in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, when he gave to his church the power of binding and loosing, he directs them to ask assistance by prayer, when they are gathered together, Matth. xviii. 18—20. The apostle in like manner directs the church of Corinth to proceed to this sentence when they were *gathered together, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, 1 Cor. v. 4. which could not be without calling on his name.

2. It is to be accompanied with *lamentation*, or mourning. So the apostle, reproving the church at Corinth for the omission of this sentence, tells them, that they had not mourned, that the offenders might be taken away from among them, 1 Cor. v.

2. He also denominates the execution of this sentence by this circumstance, viz. his *bewailing* them. "I shall bewail many" that have sinned already," 2 Cor. xii. 21.

3. It must be attended with a due sense of the *future judgment* of Christ. For we judge for Christ, and woe to them who dare pronounce this sentence without a persuasion on good grounds that it is the sentence of Christ himself.

The end of this sentence is for *healing*, not for *destruction*. The duties of the church to a person justly excommunicate, are prayer; admonition, as occasion is offered; forbearance from common intercourse; and a readiness to the restoration of love, in all the fruits of it upon repentance.

## CHAP. XII.

## OF THE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES.

CHURCHES established in the foregoing order ought to hold communion among themselves, with a view to all the ends of their institution. These ends are the same in all ; and may be comprised in this general one, the edification of the body of Christ, or the catholic church ; the promotion of which is committed to all particular churches. This plainly shows the necessity they are under of holding mutual communion together.

The duties of this communion in one church are equal and of the same kind and nature towards all the churches in the world. There is no such *inequality* or *subordination* among them, as should make any difference among them in this respect ; so that the acts of some should be acts of *authority*, and those of others acts of *obedience* or *subjection*. Wherever there is a church, whether in a city or village ; and however much one may differ from another with respect to those advantages which contribute to a superior degree of usefulness, nevertheless, in point of communion they are all equal. The abuse of such advantages gave rise to that disorder which at length destroyed the catholic church : For the *guides* of certain churches insensibly turned the addresses made to them, and the advices desired in the way of communion, into an usurpation of superior honour, order, and jurisdiction, which effectually overturned all that order and communion that belongs to particular churches.

The care of the church catholic, or what Paul calls *The care of all the churches*, 2 Cor. xi. 28, was committed by our Lord Jesus Christ to the apostles whilst they lived. What was a most *weighty charge* to them, has been since contended for by others as a matter of *dignity* and *power* ; the issue of which is a shocking tyranny. But if a thousand pretences should be made of supplying the defects of churches since the decease of the apostles by any other means than that of the *equal communion* of churches among themselves, they will all be found destitute of any countenance from the scripture, primitive antiquity the nature and end of churches, and of the Christian religion itself. However false such pretences are, yet they are the alone foundation of the whole of that arrangement which now prevails in the world, of churches into *several storeys of subordination*, with authority and jurisdiction over one another.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in his infinite wisdom, hath so constituted his churches, that having a mutual interest in each other. and animated by one spirit, every one of them might exercise its gifts and graces to the preservation and edification of the whole.

Here, then, we are ready to acknowledge, lies the great difference between us and others about the state of the church of Christ in this world. We believe that the mutual communion of particular churches among themselves, consisting in an equality of power and order, though not of gifts and usefulness, is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, after the death of the apostles, for attaining the general end of all particular churches, which is the edification of the church catholic, in faith, love, and peace.

But it must be observed, that although the communion of churches be essentially the same among all churches in the world, yet with respect to the ordinary actual exercise of the duties thereof, it is limited by divine providence to such churches as are planted within these lines of communication, those boundaries of places and countries, which may not render the mutual performance of such duties altogether impracticable. Nevertheless the world itself is not so wide, all places being open to navigation, but this communion of churches may be visibly professed, and, in some instances practised among all churches, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, where the name of Christ is known among the Gentiles.

Such a communion of churches, then, is to be sought, as that from which no true church of Christ is or can be excluded, in the actual exercise of which they may and ought all to live; and thus the general end of all churches be attained in the edification of the catholic church. This is the true and only catholicism, which, whoever departs from, or substitutes any thing else in the place of, under that name, destroys its nature and counteracts the whole of that *harmony* which is of Christ's institution.

However much therefore we plead for the rights of particular churches, yet our real controversy with most in the world is with respect to the church catholic; the union and communion of which are by many variously perverted, and separated into parties, by confining it to rules, measures, and laws of their own invention and establishment. For such things as these neither belong to the external nor internal form of that catholic church, in the being of which we believe, and the union of which we are obliged to preserve. And we cannot but declare, that whoever limits or describes the catholic church as consisting in any thing else but the communion of particular churches, utterly overturns it.

To confine the union and communion of the catholic church to any such churches as those called *provincial* and *national*, is really destructive both of the church and its communion. For these, both politically and in their church capacity, are confined to certain bounds which hinder them from holding communion with the church as catholic; and thus its union and communion are utterly lost.

Having made these observations, we now proceed to point out the true union and communion of particular churches among themselves, where all that church order which Christ hath appointed is preserved, in opposition to that mere subjection to officers (who are made so by rules foreign to the scripture) and to that system of churches, by which said union and communion are overthrown.

I say then, that the true and only union of all particular churches consists in that which gives life and being to the church catholic: And it lies in their having all one God and Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, one hope of their calling, or the promised inheritance, one regeneration; the same ordinances of Baptism and the Supper, the observance of the same rules or commands of Christ in all church order; united to God and Christ in one Spirit, through the bond of faith and love.

This description, or what amounts to the same, is the whole account that scripture gives of what constitutes the catholic church, and consequently the union of particular churches among themselves. Whatever church, therefore, fails in any part of said description is separated from the visible catholic church, and has neither union nor communion with any true churches of Christ.

There may be differences among some of the churches with respect to several of these things, arising from remaining infirmities, ignorance, and prejudice, the best knowing here but in part; nevertheless, while the substance of them is preserved, and their nature, meaning, and use not perverted, the union of all churches, as well as that of the catholic church, is preserved.

In order to illustrate a little farther the above description, we make the following observations.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the *origin* and *spring* of this union, and every particular church is united to him as its head. This the apostle expressly declares to be the foundation of its union, Ephes. iv. 15, 16. Col. ii. 19. In like manner *it is also in God the Father*, 2 Thes. i. 1. or hath God as its Father. Therefore, to this, faith in Christ, with respect to what belongs to his person, office, and doctrine, together with all other evangelical graces, are essentially necessary. This is the kingly, royal, beautiful union of the church of Christ, where he appears as its only head of influence and government, taking it into relation with himself as his body, communicating to it of his Spirit, ruling it by the law of his word, and thus fitting it for all the duties of faith, love and holiness. Here we see the blessed oneness which Jesus prayed for so earnestly to his disciples, namely, that *they might be one in the Father and the Son, one among themselves*, and *made perfect in one*, John. xvii. 20—23. Wherever, then, true faith, holiness, and mutual love, and obedience to the commandments of Christ, continue, there is the visible catholic church; beside which, I believe in no



catholic church in the world, nor in any thing else as necessary to its constitution.

2. With respect to the communion of churches among themselves, this lies in their mutual acting of the same gospel duties towards God in Christ, and towards each other. There is a communion in *faith* among all the churches of Christ,—all holding the same doctrine, which is according to godliness—so that every one is the ground and pillar of the same truth. This the ancient church provided for in creeds or confessions of faith, which indeed were never expressly owned by all churches, and in process of time were abused, by being made to represent the sense of the present church, whether true or false. Hence, we have as many Arian creeds yet extant as those which are orthodox. But in order to the communion of particular churches, nothing more is necessary than such a profession as we have shewed must be made by individual members at admission, viz. a belief that the scriptures are the word of God, with a professed assent to the fundamental doctrines thereof: These are, the doctrine of the holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, his Divine Person and Office, the Redemption of the Church by his blood, the necessity of Regeneration, and the like, which cannot be omitted in the profession. For a society may hold the scripture to be the word of God, and yet so far misunderstand the sense of the Holy Spirit therein, as to embrace errors which prevent their communion in faith with the catholic church.

3. This communion of churches consists much in one of the principal fruits of faith, that is, *prayer*. This is stated Ephes. ii. 18. “For through Christ we have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Prayer, in all churches, has one object,—proceeds in all from the same Spirit, who is given to them as a spirit of grace and supplication; which are continually offered unto God by the same High Priest, who adds to them the incense of his own intercession. This communion is still more expressed in this view, that the *prayers of all are for all*; so that there is no particular church, nor any member thereof, but what have the prayers of all the churches in the world, and of all their members every day. However invisible this communion be to the eyes of the flesh, yet it is conspicuous to the eye of faith, and constitutes a part of the glory of Christ the Mediator in heaven.

4. The bond of this union is *love*;—not what is commonly called human affection, nor that benevolence which is naturally engraven on the hearts of men towards the same species; but a special grace of the Holy Spirit, in which much of the life, power, and peculiar glory of Christianity consist. By this mutual love, which exerts itself in its manifold acts and duties, every individual church, in its members, and all the churches of Christ among themselves, are cemented together, and united to Christ the head, as members of the same body one with another.

Thus the catholic church, having Christ for its head, is fitly joined and compacted together, this love working effectually in every part, in every office, officer, and member,—all contributing their share to the edification of the body. Here a beautiful union and communion are produced and directed, wholly upon the principles and laws of the gospel.

This account of the union and communion of churches may seem strange to those who are in love with that image of them erected in the world, which is compacted by the iron joints and bands of human laws, edifying itself by certain constitutions, outward order, various subordinations, &c. which are entirely foreign to Christianity.

---

[With a view to promote the communion of churches, Dr OWEN approves of Synods or Associations, but of a very different complexion from those of modern times. He denies that any one is a member of such, merely from office,—proves that none are so but those who are elected messengers by the particular churches concerned, to which the very being and time of these meetings are owing,—that the messengers may be either office-bearers or private members, as may appear most convenient,—that their determination has no higher claim than that of ADVICE, which the church or churches whom it may respect are to consider, and then to adopt or reject, as may appear to be their duty from the WORD OF GOD.]

---

The two following LETTERS, transcribed from an author already quoted (Mr MORRICE), will serve as a specimen of that communion of churches which has been pleaded for, where their equality is strictly preserved, and their mutual assistance in the instance here alluded to, as well as in every other, may be seen. At the same time, they afford a striking contrast to those Addresses and Humble Petitions presented to what are called Church Courts; so that it will not be difficult for any person to discover which of these ways correspond most with the manner and spirit of that communion of churches exhibited in the New Testament.

*The CHURCH of CHRIST sojourning at C—— to the CHURCH of CHRIST sojourning at H—— and the adjacent Villages,—all grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer.*

“ DEARLY BELOVED IN OUR LORD,

“ IT is not long since we sat in the region and shadow of death, without any desire after the knowledge of God,—stran-

gers to the covenant of promise, and without God in the world ; but we have found him whom we did not seek, and he is manifested to us, though we asked not for him. May heaven be forever filled with praises to God for this salvation ! We call upon you and all the people of God to be thankful to the Father of Lights in our behalf. Our first fruits were met with in your assemblies ; and God hath greatly spread the blessing. We are,—O amazing mercy we can say it !—We are a church of Christ ; and we do, with the greatest freedom, profess, that he is our Beloved and our Friend. He is precious to us ; it is our desire to follow him fully—We are not yet furnished with proper officers for his service and our edification ; but our ascended Lord, who giveth gifts unto men, encourages us to hope we have those among ourselves he designs for his service ; and we trust that he will direct our choice. We have, with submission to the overruling providence of our Redeemer, fixed upon the 8th and 9th days of the seventh month next ensuing, for the setting them apart by solemn ordination to their proper work. We earnestly beg your prayers.”

---

### THE ANSWER.

*The CHURCH of CHRIST sojourning at H—— to the CHURCH of CHRIST sojourning at C——, wishing all grace and peace.*

“ DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

“ It is impossible to express with what joy *your letter* was read and heard among us ! We have blessed our God for you, and continually seek his face, that you may daily have, clearly know, and great triumph in the *joyful sound* ;—that your *faith* in Christ, the faith that worketh by love, attended with gospel obedience, may evidently flourish ;—that *brotherly love* may be constant and fervent ;—that your *increase* may be great, so that many evangelical churches may spring forth from you ! *Let the people praise thee, O Lord ! Let all the people praise thee !*

“ According to your request, we have sent our messengers, our much honoured and beloved bishops F— and C—, and our dear brethren B— and T—. Recieve them in the Lord. All grace and peace be with you ;—the sincere and fervent wish of your brethren in the Lord.

“ Ordered at our church meeting,” &c.







